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## ECUMENISM

THE PRINCIPLE OF *OIKONOMIA* AS PASTORAL CONCESSION:  
ORTHODOX CHURCH PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Sabu Panachickal

ECUMENICAL ROLE OF THE MALANKARA CATHOLIC CHURCH:  
A HISTORICO - CANONICAL ANALYSIS

Dr. George Theckadayil

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## ECUMENISM

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## Editorial

**H**oly Father Pope Francis during a private meeting with an ecumenical group on 10 October 2014 said that we are sinning against Christ's will when we continue to focus on our differences. He added that our shared baptism was more important than our differences. On another occasion, during the weekly general audience on August 27, 2014 the Pope, while speaking on the unity and holiness of the Church, stated that despite the fact of our sinful character we are called to live as a community centered on Christ. He went on saying that in a Christian community division is one of the most serious sins, because it does not allow God to act. What God wants is that we be welcoming, that we forgive and love each other so as to become more and more like Him, who is communion and love. On the affirmation in the Creed that the Church is one and holy, the Pope explained that *one* because she has origin in the 'Triune God, mystery of unity and full communion; *holy* because she is founded by Jesus Christ, enlivened by his Holy Spirit, and filled his love and salvation.

In the just concluded Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, the third of its kind in the history, in October 2014, attracted the keen attention of the whole world, both religious as well as secular. The public media was competing to create the impression that there were two prevalent and quarreling groups in the Catholic Church - one conservative and the other liberal. But the

Pope explained that 'the synod is not a parliament, but a protected space where the Holy Spirit can work'. He lamented that the view of the media was somewhat in the style of sports or political chronicles: often there was talk of two teams, for and against, conservatives and progressives. But he assured the world that everything happened 'cum Petro et sub Petro,' that is, with the presence of the Pope, which is a guarantee for freedom and trust. It is true that in the synod there was a very frank discussion of the serious challenges being faced by the family in the modern world. One of the main issues discussed heatedly was the delicate and often mentioned issue of the reception of communion for the civilly divorced and remarried couples. The Pope's continuous speeches on the theme of mercy were interpreted as his favourable mind to giving communion to such couples in irregular marital situation. But the Pope has repeatedly underlined the fact that there will be no change on the fundamental truths of the Sacrament of Marriage: the indissolubility, unity, loyalty and openness to life.

The current issue of Christian Orient, dedicated to the theme of Ecumenism, reaches the readers in the context of the aforementioned discussions and ongoing media debates on similar issues raised by the past Synod of Bishops on family.

The contributors are Rev. Fr Dr Sabu John Panachickal and Rev. Fr George Theckadayil. The former, a priest of the



Eparchy of Kanjirapally, currently working as the director of Pastoral Animation Centre, Anakkara, is also visiting professor at St Joseph's Pontifical Seminary, Aluva. He has successfully defended his doctoral thesis in Leuven on the subject of "Eastern Concept of Oikonomia: Implications for ecumenical theology, sacramentology and ecology". In the last December issue of *Christian Orient* also he had written an article entitled "*Oikoumene* as Unity and the Quest for Unity: Historical Development and Implications" wherein he explained and analyzed the historical context of the use and understanding of the term *Oikoumene* from which the term ecumenism takes its origin. In this issue, as the continuation of his former article, he explores the theme on "The Principle of *Oikonomia* as Pastoral Concession: Orthodox Church Perspective". The focus of this article is to throw light on how the understanding of this term developed in the Orthodox Churches in the wake of pastoral problems concerning ecclesiastical and sacramental issues such as reception of the sacraments of heretics and schismatics, reception of repentant clergy and problem of divorce and remarriage. This endeavour intends to develop an exposition mainly in line with the Orthodox Church's view.

The latter, a priest of the Syro-Malankara Archeparchy of Thiruvalla, is presently doing his doctoral studies in theology on the theme of "Communion Ecclesiology" at Dharmaram Vidyashetram, Bangalore. He has obtained licentiate in Canon Law from the same theological faculty and is currently the executive member of the Oriental Canon Law Society of India. In his

article entitled, "Ecumenical Role of the Malankara Catholic Church: A Historico - Canonical Analysis", he explores the short history of the re-union movement of the Malankara Catholic Church. He establishes that this movement bore fruit as a result of effective ecumenical attempts that took place down through the centuries. He says that it should not stand still in the hope that everything has been accomplished but has to proceed with further enthusiasm by obligatorily taking up the tedious work of promoting the Church unity. The Malankara Catholic Church is rightly called as a bridge-making Church. This Church has to strive to unite all the non-Catholic Churches into the fold of the Catholic Church for which the author has tried to suggest many principles and practical applications.

The Unity Octave, the week of Prayer for Christian Unity, is fast approaching once again. It will be from 18-25 January, 2015. The theme for the year 2015 is taken from the Gospel of St John Chapter 4, verse 7. Jesus said to her: "Give me to drink". This theme has been jointly prepared by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission of Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. It is a matter of joy and hope that all the Churches sincerely pray for the unity of the Church and plan effective ways of celebration worldwide. Let us pray with our Lord and savior Jesus to the Heavenly Father, "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn. 17: 21).

**Dr. Sebastian Vaniyapurackal**

# The Principle of Oikonomia as Pastoral Concession: Orthodox Church Perspective

Dr. Sabu Panachickal

## Introduction

The recently convened extraordinary assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church (5-19 October, 2014) has had the theme, 'the Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization,' as agenda for its discussion and deliberation. The pre-synodal theological discussions and the preparations for the Synod of Bishops have given an impression that there will be an epoch-making decision by the Catholic Church regarding the problem of the communion to the divorced and the remarried, by adopting the Orthodox principle of *oikonomia*. Therefore, there is a new awakened interest among theological scholars and ecclesiastical leaders to learn more about this pastoral solution followed by the Orthodox Church. However, it is not the first time that the principle of economy has been put into the limelight of Catholic theological discussions as a solution for ever increasing pastoral issues. The Orthodox and

Roman Catholic Bilateral Consultation in 1975-76 has given more attention to this pastoral principle and also theologians like Walter Kasper, Bernhard Häring etc. have dealt with *oikonomia* as a recourse to pastoral problems. The focus of this essay is to elucidate how this understanding of the term has been developed and utilised in the Orthodox Churches in the wake of pastoral problems concerning ecclesiastical and sacramental issues such as reception of the sacraments of heretics and schismatics, reception of repentant clergy and problem of divorce and remarriage. This endeavour intends to develop an exposition only in line with the Orthodox Church's view, however with occasional comments from other denominations.

The patristic usage of the eastern theological term *oikonomia* along with other meanings implies also the idea of condescension and leniency.<sup>1</sup> These implications of the term are deductions from

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<sup>1</sup> Horst Balz & Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991) 498; John Reumann, "The use of *Oikonomia* and Related Terms in Greek sources to about A. D. 100," *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 61 (1979) 563-603, 571. For many uses of the word *oikonomia*, Cf. W. F. Arndt & F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature* (Chicago, 1957) 562.



the writings of John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria and mainly that of St Basil the Great.<sup>2</sup> The fathers deduced these inferences from one of the basic meanings of the term: prudent administration. Connected with this sense of *oikonomia*, there are also other meanings like discretion, consideration or concession and reserve. These usages recur in later authors implying policy, compromise, and leniency in sharp practices. The principle of economy or the ecclesiastical economy is considered to be a practice in the undivided Church from the early times onwards as claimed by the Orthodox Church. There has been a tradition of receiving back the strayed believers, because of heresy or schism, to the Church by acknowledging their sacraments, however, with imposition of penance. Among the fathers and early leaders of the Church, there are many who opted for leniency while others favoured rigorousness in dealing with the reception of heretics and schismatics and recognizing their sacraments. It is from these two mentalities or attitudes that there are two approaches: strictness or *akribeia* and leniency or *oikonomia*.

## The Principle of *Oikonomia*: Possibility of a Definition

Generally in the ecclesiastical practice 'economy' or *oikonomia* is a term with many meanings. In its broadest meaning it includes and signifies the entire work of salvation. However, in canonical realm 'economy' has not really become a technical term. Rather being a descriptive word, 'economy' is put opposite to 'strictness' (*akribeia*) designating a kind of relaxation of Church discipline, an exemption or exception from the 'strict rule' or from the general rule.<sup>3</sup> Though claimed by many as not possible to have a definition on the principle of *oikonomia*, there are a few attempts to define it. Greek Orthodox moral theologian Stanley Harakas concisely defines *oikonomia* as "the carrying out of the spirit rather than the exact and rigid letter of a law without a contravention of any prescription, canonical or legal. It addresses the issues of human and spiritual well being as they relate to the application of church rules."<sup>4</sup> Even though he puts it as a definition it does not explain the content and substance rather than

<sup>2</sup> Basil the Great, *Epist.* 188, ab. 373, canon 1, *PG* 32. 669; *Epist.* 199, canon 47, second canonical letter, *PG* 32, 751; John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Act. Apost.* xlvii, Migne, *PG* 60, 323; Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep.* lxxvi, Migne, *PG* 77, 353.

<sup>3</sup> George Florovsky, "The Limits of the Church," *The Church Quarterly Review* CXVII (1933) 117-131, 120.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life: Theoria of Eastern Orthodox Ethics* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, 1983) 33; Stanley Harakas, *Guidelines for Marriage in the Orthodox Church* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, n. d.) 16.

giving a general description. Yet another attempt is there as definition which is more descriptive and gives more details:

According to Orthodox Canon Law, the term *oikonomia* denotes a timely and logically defensible deviation from a canonically established rule for the sake of bringing salvation either within or outside the Church. But this deviation does not extend to the point where it could violate the dogmatical boundaries of the rule in question. Also, *oikonomia* should be decided upon only by the canonically instituted authority of the Church.... It should be kept in mind, however, that *oikonomia* is an out of the ordinary ecclesiastical measure, the nature of which is timely and its duration temporary. Its intent is solely Christian, an expression of the love that guides the Church and of the virtues that issue from it, sympathy, leniency and understanding of human weakness. But no dogmatical boundaries should be moved or removed when *oikonomia* is applied.<sup>5</sup>

As Dyovouniotes puts "economy, contrasted with "*akribeia*" (the exact and strict observance of the canons), is the non-strict, and non-exact observance of the canons, a

deviation from the canons." He even suggests that it is an assimilation of the Roman idea of *causa justa* (for well-grounded reasons). The well-grounded reason for exercising economy is "the salvation of the souls which is the final object of the church." This objective is explained more elaborately when he states: "The church, that is to say, considering the spiritual interest of the majority, makes use of economy to save them from spiritual injury, and to secure for them greater spiritual profit than they would have possessed had "*akribeia*" been enforced."<sup>6</sup> According to John Meyendorff, the term *oikonomia* is not belonging at first to the legal terminology and therefore should not be defined as a legal norm.<sup>7</sup> After stating the original Greek meaning of the term as "household management," Meyendorff summarises the whole scriptural and patristic and later meanings of the term. Accordingly, it designates in the New Testament the divine plan of salvation. However, this divine plan for the management of history and of the world has been entrusted to human beings. For Paul, preaching of the word is an *oikonomia*, entrusted by God and therefore, apostles should be considered as 'servants of Christ and stewards (*oikonomoi*) of the mysteries of God.' Importantly this

<sup>5</sup> Nikon D. Patrinos, *A Dictionary of Greek Orthodoxy* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, 1984) 31.

<sup>6</sup> C. Dyovouniotes, "The principle of Economy," *The Church Quarterly Review* 116 (1933) 93-101, 96. However, the statement of Dyovouniotes after his examination of the use of economy regarding the reception of heretics and schismatics, that "economy, which is opposed to "*akribeia*," and is consequently something different from "*akribeia*" when employed concerning the sacraments, changes invalid into valid sacraments, and valid into invalid sacraments," has been criticised by many, especially George Florovsky.

<sup>7</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 1983) 89.



management or stewardship is applicable to those who execute the ministry of guiding the Church, mainly to the *episkopos*.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the principle of *oikonomia* is more of a means of salvation for the world through the Church exercised by the leaders of the Church. This is the meaning of *oikonomia* when it was used as a principle in the canonical texts by the fathers of the Church. Meyendorff states that *oikonomia* has the normative meaning of "incarnation history" in the fathers especially during the Christological controversies and "in a subsidiary way it is also used in canonical texts, and then, obviously places pastoral "management" entrusted to the Church in the context of God's plan for the salvation of mankind."<sup>9</sup>

Meyendorff, however, has distinguished *oikonomia* from the Western concept of *dispensatio* (dispensation). He observes in the Latin versions of the New Testament and in later ecclesiastical expressions that the term *oikonomia* is constantly translated as *dispensatio*. In Western canon law the term *dispensatio* attained a distinct

meaning of an 'exception to the law granted by the proper authority.' However, for Erickson, "*oikonomia* is understood as the departure from or suspension of strict application (*akribeia*) of the Church's canons and disciplinary norms, making it in many respects analogous to the West's *dispensatio*. But *oikonomia* is broader than *dispensatio* in that it is not limited to canon law but applies to sacramental theology as well."<sup>10</sup> According to Meyendorff, there are numerous citations of *oikonomia* in the Byzantine canonical and theological literature unmistakably interpreting it in a much wider perspective. He holds the view that because of its nature, *oikonomia* cannot be defined as a legal norm.<sup>11</sup> "What is at stake is not only an exception to the law, but an obligation to decide individual issues in the general context of God's plan for the salvation of the world. Canonical structures may sometimes be inadequate to the full reality and universality of the Gospel, and, by themselves, do not provide the assurance that, in applying them, one is obedient to the Will of God."<sup>12</sup> Meyendorff depends on the expression of Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos

<sup>8</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 88.

<sup>9</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 88.

<sup>10</sup> John H. Erickson, *The Challenge of Our Past: Studies in Orthodox Canon Law and Church History* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1991), 116. Certain meanings of the term *oikonomia* signify what is meant by "indulgence," and "dispensation." In the Orthodox Church too there are such practices which are akin to the Western granting of dispensation. These exercises of economy include exception or dispensation from Friday fast, permission to marry a cousin, a dispensation to lay aside the priestly garb etc. Cf. Frank Gavin, *Some Aspects of the Contemporary Greek Orthodox Thought* (New York: AMS Press, 1970) 296.

<sup>11</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 89. Meyendorff says there are practical misuses and abuses of this principle frequently occurring around especially in the modern ecclesiastical situation.

<sup>12</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 89.



(901-907) to give a summary statement on the principle of *oikonomia*. Accordingly, for the Byzantines *oikonomia* is "an imitation of God's love for man" and not merely an "exception to the rule."<sup>13</sup> He observes that in the history of Byzantium there has been no denial of the principle of *oikonomia*. Rather, there was only agreement among all by conforming to the statement of Eulogius, Patriarch of Alexandria (581-607): "One rightly can practice *oikonomia* whenever pious doctrine remains unharmed."<sup>14</sup> It means that *oikonomia* involves the practical implications for Christian life and belief, however without compromising the truth itself.<sup>15</sup> It is therefore evident that the concept of *oikonomia* must ultimately be about God's Plan for the Salvation of human beings rather than such worldly considerations.

Strictly looking at from a canonical perspective, the elimination of the letter of the law by the spirit of the law has in fact directed to the institution of 'economy,' exercised in ecclesiastical matters. Economy is always an exception to the common regulation and the legal consequences following the breach of a law are lifted. The proficient ecclesiastical authority decides economy. This is a sort of kindness which is warranted by the Church's passionate aspiration to avoid any difficult effects from

the stringent observation of the law in exceptional circumstances. The principle upon which an exception is approved is the common good of the Church. This premise exists in all systems of law but it finds its fullest expression in the Church's law. 'Economy is the law of grace and therefore it is characterised principally by the spiritual qualities of compassion, pastoral sensitivity, and forgiveness. Economy is not something to be used subjectively. It is administered by definite guiding principles that are to be exactly held fast to by the competent ecclesiastical authority granting it. Economy is a divergence from the normative. Therefore, once economy has been exercised in a particular case, the normative practice is reinstated as before. Additionally, a temporary departure from the normative practice through economy does not start an example.'<sup>16</sup>

As explained above many are in two minds to compare the theory of economy of the Orthodox Church to the theory of dispensation of the Catholic Church. According to Douglas the principle of economy is not having any juridical aspect. Its exercise could not be, therefore, codified. "Economy may ... be defined as an exercise of her stewardship by the Church whereby that which by the strict letter of her law is

<sup>13</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 89. Nicholas Mystikos, *Ep. 32, PG 111: 213A*. (Letter to the Pope).

<sup>14</sup> Eulogius, quoted by Photius in *Library*, 227; ed. R Henry (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1965), 4: 112.

<sup>15</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 90.

<sup>16</sup> Lewis Patsavos, "The Canonical Tradition of the Orthodox Church," (from Internet, accessed on 20-06-2010) <http://www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/articles/article7071.asp>.

forbidden, is permitted."<sup>17</sup> In accordance with the need of the circumstance every exercise of economy surpasses law even though there is no suppression of the law, because the active principle in economy is not justice, it is love. It is modelled after the redemptive action of Christ. Economy of salvation is the divine *philanthropia*, which transcends the *akribeia* of divine justice. The condescension of Christ has not been contradictory to divine justice but was complementary to it. Every case in which particular circumstances related to the spiritual life of the Orthodox Church or its collective or individual contacts with those who are not belonging to its *Communio in sacris* brings *akribeia* into apparent conflict with *philanthropia*. However, so long as *philanthropia* does not reverse or negate that which has been revealed, "the law of love" is open to rule the resolution.<sup>18</sup> The exercise of economy should take into consideration two important aspects: the need of the individual and the well being of the Church. Accordingly, the derogation from the exactness of the law is allowed only by taking

into consideration that the piety, faith and purity of the doctrine stay unchanged.<sup>19</sup> Because of these aspects an instance of economy exercised in a particular case could be declined in another in which the circumstances may seem to be closely similar. Likewise, the exercise of economy which routinely has been sanctioned to perform for individuals or groups of individuals could come to an end at any time. In nutshell, the exercise of economy is controlled and applied only for circumstances in which it is guaranteed "to be for the salvation of an individual soul or for the welfare of the Church and of the Kingdom of Christ." However, there is also restriction regarding the refusal of every exercise of economy, which is assumed to be harmful to the welfare of the Church.<sup>20</sup>

The discussion about the possibility of a definition reaches not at any specific one than pointing at what is to be called a narration of its nature. The difference of opinion whether it is a legal thing or just a pastoral concession remains as unsolved in

<sup>17</sup> J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy and Its Exercise," *The Christian East* 13:3 (1932) 91-98, 92. Michael Azkoul, however, gives a definition that is more of a canonical and juridical nature. Accordingly, economy is "that elusive and pervasive device by which the Orthodox bishop for the salvation of the non-Orthodox Christians as well as ecclesiastical order and fellowship deviates from the strict and normative (*akribeia*) application of her laws." Cf. Michael Azkoul, "Oikonomia and the Orthodox Church," *The Patristic and Byzantine Review* 6 (1987) 65-79, 65.

<sup>18</sup> J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy and Its Exercise," 92.

<sup>19</sup> A Nihal, "Sacraments -An insight from the Orthodox Church," *Chicago Studies* 14 (1975) 252-259, 253. Nihal draws his conclusion from the highly rated work of Jerome Kotsonis, *The Problems of Ecclesiastical Economy*, (published in Greek and later in French). Nihal observes that the "deviation from the exactness of the law is *not necessarily* towards leniency. It could in certain cases be stricter than the requirement of the law." He points out as an example Acts 16:3 in which, Paul urged Timothy to be circumcised because his father was a Greek.

<sup>20</sup> J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy and Its Exercise," 92.



every description regarding the principle of *oikonomia*. Perhaps this lack of precision in definition may be the main drawback of it as a theological principle. However, it would be great to consider economy as a "theological reality right at the heart of the Church, rooted in the living power of the Spirit, ever present in the community."<sup>21</sup> The next point of discussion would offer us a little more clarity regarding the principle of *oikonomia* looking at it as a means of salvation.

### ***Oikonomia* and *Akribeia*: Means of Salvation**

The Inter-orthodox Preparatory Commission in its report on "Economy in the Orthodox Church," submitted to the First Pre-conciliar Pan-orthodox Conference deals with the content and nature of the doctrine of *oikonomia* in its details.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, the sacramental relationship between Christ and the Church as the mystical body of Christ is foundational for the Church to exercise economy. It means that the Church continues the saving activities of Christ. The Commission states: "the Church of Christ is the holy and infallible body within which, and

through which, the work of man's salvation is realized. The whole institution of the Church is held together and constituted by the indwelling Holy Spirit, who heals what is weak and makes up that which is wanting. The Church, as the ark of grace and truth, expressing herself through the proper channels and dispensing the treasure of divine grace, leads the faithful to salvation."<sup>23</sup> For the salvation of human beings the Church makes use of its two kinds of governance and correction; *akribeia*, that is "strict application of the law," and *oikonomia*, that is "economy, modified and flexible application of the law." Economy or *oikonomia* is also called condescension with this meaning. The stewards (*oikonomoi*) of the Holy Spirit direct human beings to salvation with the application of these two possibilities of governance and correction.<sup>24</sup> The same idea is given in another way by Patriarch Dositheus of Jerusalem when it is clarified that there are two ways of depicting the dealings of the Church: by *akribeia* and by *oikonomia*. If the affairs of the Church are not resolved by *akribeia* they are to be resolved by *oikonomia*.<sup>25</sup> They are considered as means of salvation at

<sup>21</sup> Ladislav Örsy, "In Search of the meaning of *Oikonomia*: Report on a Convention," *Theological Studies* 43 (1982) 312-319, 316.

<sup>22</sup> The Interorthodox Preparatory Commission, "Economy in the Orthodox Church," in Preparatory Commission of the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church 1971, *Towards a Great Council: Introductory Reports of the Interorthodox Commission in Preparation for the Next Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church* (London: SPCK, 1973) 39-54.

<sup>23</sup> The Interorthodox Preparatory Commission, "Economy in the Orthodox Church," 39; John G. Yockey, "Economic Mercy for All," *New Theology Review* 3 (1990) 71-87, 80.

<sup>24</sup> Timothy Ware, *Eustratius Argenti: A Study of the Greek Church under Turkish Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964) 83.

<sup>25</sup> The Interorthodox Preparatory Commission, "Economy in the Orthodox Church," 39; Patriarch Dositheus of Jerusalem, *Letter to Michael of Belgrade* (May 1706) in K. Delikanis, *Patriarchal Documents* (Constantinople 1905, vol. III, 684).

the disposal of the Church. The Commission in a summary gives what they exactly mean by using these terms. Accordingly, "*akribeia* denotes the Church's strict adherence to the canonical ordinances concerning each believer."<sup>26</sup> It means that there is ecclesiastical regulation for the life of human beings in accordance with the teachings of the gospel and the canons of the Church to have a better relationship with God. Therefore, this relationship is one of canonicity and *akribeia*. This relationship is based on the proper and complete reception of the revealed truth and grace and also on the correct and total agreement in freedom to the canons put forward by the Church.<sup>27</sup> Whereas "*oikonomia* denotes the Church's loving care towards her members who transgress her canonical ordinances, and also towards those Christians who are outside her body and wish to enter it."<sup>28</sup> After explaining different meanings of *oikonomia*, especially the economy of salvation, the Commission states that it is the Church who maintains to provide the faithful with the saving activities of Jesus Christ in the world. Therefore, the holy Fathers and ecclesiastical writers have given the name economy to the activities of the Church. Thus, there is the name 'ecclesiastical economy,' 'saving economy,' or 'economy of the Church.' The Commission states that it is "the Church's right and mandate, copying the economy of Christ and displaying, as a

mother according to grace, an especial loving-kindness, to employ economy when dealing with the diverse weaknesses and shortcomings of men in their faith and the Christian life."<sup>29</sup> Economy is then given a detailed explanation:

Economy can be regarded either as a kind of deviation from the full and exact acceptance of the saving truth—a deviation permitted to a man because of his inability to grasp this truth completely and apply it in his life; or else as a deviation from the exact and full observance of canon law. Yet at the same time economy does not abolish exactness, since the Church through her love and her sanctifying divine grace makes up all that is lacking in the life of her members.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, *oikonomia* or economy could be viewed as an accommodating principle that permits a divergence from the strict execution of a conventional ecclesiastical order without disrupting that order. These two principles are in a sense two poles deciding the boundaries within which the work of the Church takes place with reference to her own believers and other Christians belonging to other churches. Accordingly, these two principles comprise "the two main ways in which the Church can advance in the use of the means of salvation."<sup>31</sup> The principal motive of

<sup>26</sup> The Interorthodox Preparatory Commission, "Economy in the Orthodox Church," 40.

<sup>27</sup> The Interorthodox Preparatory Commission, "Economy in the Orthodox Church," 40.

<sup>28</sup> The Interorthodox Preparatory Commission, "Economy in the Orthodox Church," 40.

<sup>29</sup> The Interorthodox Preparatory Commission, "Economy in the Orthodox Church," 40.

<sup>30</sup> The Interorthodox Preparatory Commission, "Economy in the Orthodox Church," 41.

<sup>31</sup> The Interorthodox Preparatory Commission, "Economy in the Orthodox Church," 41.



'economy' is exactly 'philanthropy,' pastoral discretion, a pedagogical calculation for the practical utility. Therefore, economy is an aspect of pedagogical rather than canonical consciousness.<sup>32</sup> In a nutshell, "economy springs from an understanding of God's purpose in the Church, from the contemplation of the saving power of God, and for that reason it can lead beyond the limits of the law."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, as Nikolaos the Mystic holds, ecclesiastical economy or *oikonomia* is an image of divine *oikonomia* and love toward humankind.<sup>34</sup>

The Orthodox-Roman Catholic Bilateral Consultation in the United States in 1975 and 1976 has dealt with the wide range of theological questions considered to be decisive for the mutual understanding between the two Churches. One of the subjects that has been a matter of paramount attention was *oikonomia* or ecclesiastical "economy," which is an important principle for the Orthodox Church. More attention has been given to this theme because of its potential significance to the question of

mutual recognition of Churches and this has received increasing attention among Anglicans and Roman Catholics in recent years.<sup>35</sup> After having agreed upon the basic meaning of the Greek word *oikonomia* as management, arrangement, or determination in the strictly literal sense, some other overtones are detected for it as *oikonomia* implying accommodation, prudent adaptation of means to an end, diplomacy and strategy and even dissimulation and the "pious lie." *Oikonomia* can also have extremely constructive implications like the idea of stewardship, of management on behalf of another or on behalf of a superior.<sup>36</sup> Important theological themes such as Incarnation, the redemption brought about by Christ etc. are also seen as decisive factors in developing and determining the Orthodox understanding of *oikonomia*. Accordingly, "economy is derived from the Pauline notions of God's plan of salvation, the divine management of history, the stewardship of the mysteries of God, and the direction or administration of the Church ...The

<sup>32</sup> George Florovsky, "The Limits of the Church," 120.

<sup>33</sup> James A. Coriden, "Rules for Interpreters, 285. See also Ladislav Orsy, "In Search of the meaning of *Oikonomia*: Report on a Convention," 318.

<sup>34</sup> Nikolaos the Mystic of Constantinople, *Letter 32*, PG 111, 213.

<sup>35</sup> Orthodox-Roman Catholic Bilateral Consultation, "The Principle of Economy: A Joint Statement 1976," in Edward Kilmartin, *Toward Reunion: The Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 85-88, 85. The dialogue on economy by the Consultation has taken into consideration the preliminary report prepared in 1971 by the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission for the Great Council of the Orthodox Church. Quite a number of Orthodox and Roman Catholic participants have expressed their dissatisfaction with the interpretations given to certain texts and historical incidents. However, they have found the report as an effective start for further discussion. Cf. Orthodox-Roman Catholic Bilateral Consultation, "The Principle of Economy: A Joint Statement 1976," 85.

<sup>36</sup> Orthodox-Roman Catholic Bilateral Consultation, "The Principle of Economy: A Joint Statement 1976," 86.

analogical meanings, already present in the New Testament, continue throughout the history of Eastern theology and canon law: management or stewardship in the Church in imitation of God's stewardship of human salvation.<sup>37</sup>

The concept of *oikonomia*, because of its practical implications, from the very beginning of the history of the Church, is found fully applied in theology and also in canon law. When there were situations of urgent need in unravelling pastoral problems the leaders of the Church have made decisions according to their own initiative and discretion. However, these decisions are inspired, directed and controlled by their deep ecclesiastical sense and by St. Paul's mandate to pursue "in season and out of season" (2Tim 4:2) the Church's purpose. Such interventions of the leaders of the Church have been every time and again at discrepancy with the letter or strict ecclesiastical order.<sup>38</sup> The purpose of the Church is none other than the salvation of the faithful, who are her members.<sup>39</sup> This salvation is according to the plan of God. God's saving actions with human beings as interceded in and through the Church.<sup>40</sup> Thus, *oikonomia* (economy) as a theme originated in the patristic writings in the context of the pastoral problems and

needs consequently emerged down through the history of the Orthodox Church as a guiding principle in matters of application of the law, without strictness. This guiding principle allocates a certain degree of leniency in the application of Church's law to specific cases and situations. John Chrysostom advises that one should avoid unreasonable rigidity and harshness, which may do harm. He proposes mercy and moderation in the implementation of the law.<sup>41</sup> There is theological reasoning behind such exceptions. The justice of God is unconditional and permits no exception. The breaching of the divine will means to be separated from God. If one sins he/she shall die. However, the law of God's love reasons in some other way. Consequently, just as Christ the *oikonomos* who by the law of God's Will is mediated in the *oikos* of the Christian Church, *oikonomia* includes every facet of the Christian dispensation. It constantly indicates the condescension (*sun-katabasis*) towards human frailty by which divine love reconciles divine Justice. Humankind is unqualified to be part of the family of God considering the universality of the sin and because of the strictness (*akribēiā*) of God's Justice. However, God has sent His own Son into the world to redeem it because of His caring

<sup>37</sup> James A. Coriden, "Rules for Interpreters, *The Jurist* 42 (1982) 277-303, 284.

<sup>38</sup> Edwin James Palmer, *Dispensation in Practice and Theory: With Special Reference to the Anglican Churches* (Northumberland Avenue, W. C. 2: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1944) 28.

<sup>39</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* vii, 12, Migne, PG 9.501.

<sup>40</sup> J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy and Its Exercise," 91.

<sup>41</sup> John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Act. Apost.* xlvi, Migne, PG 60, 323. The same sense and feeling is reflected much later in the Ecumenical Patriarch Kallinikos II, almost in similar words. Cf. Edwin James Palmer, *Dispensation in Practice and Theory: With Special Reference to the Anglican Churches*, 29.



love for humankind (*philanthropia*). In the redemption fashioned by Christ, both the Justice and the Love of God are united. This is explained as the *oikonomia*, the ultimate action of the Law of God's Will in which justice and love are in perfect unity.<sup>42</sup> The condescending love of God for humankind is well represented by the Incarnation of the Son. The foundational idea regarding the doctrine of economy is the concept of the condescension of God in becoming human, which is called *katabasis*. This is the main feature of the divine economy according to which God's plan to give himself to humanity and to the world is completed by the eternal plan for mankind's salvation in history.

God meets men in their existential situation in a world that is groaning in travail. He consents in His humble and loving *condescension-sunkatabasis*—to appear as the loving and merciful Lord in the circumstances brought about by human free will. Divine economy there

touches God's infinite *philanthropia*, His love for mankind. It is the supreme operation of the law of God's will in which justice and love are in perfect unity.<sup>43</sup>

This statement clearly explains that *oikonomia* or economy is really the replication of the divine intervention in the world out of His condescending mercy and love toward humanity as part of the redemptive activity.

### The Church Continues the Redemption through *Oikonomia* and *Akribeia*

This condescension "is now confided to the Church which is the sole treasury of God's grace; and therefore there is need for the Church to accept the human situation and adapt to it in a manner similar to that in which Christ became man."<sup>44</sup> Because, the Church is considered as the expansion of the "mind of Christ and His powerful operations upon us humans in an attempt to divinize us and

<sup>42</sup> J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy and Its Exercise," 91. The Interorthodox Preparatory Commission depending on the writings of the theologians presents a great list of terms that could be used in the sense of *oikonomia*. Besides the special sense of the dispensation of grace by the Church in exceptional circumstances the term *oikonomia* could stand for different other senses expressed in different terms or words. Accordingly, *oikonomia* appears as "expressed by the words *synkatabasis* (condescension), *pronomion* (privilege), *epieikeia* (mildness, i.e., prudent moderation), *eleos* (mercy), *eleemosyne* (charitable giving), *philanthropia* (philanthropy, loving-kindness), *apolyxis* (loosing), *syngnome* (pardon, forgiveness), *lysis* (freeing), *aphesis* (remission), etc." All these terms have their own particular meanings too, which are not pertaining to the idea of bestowing the sanctifying grace. These have more of an administrative and disciplinary nature related to the canonical relations and moral conduct of the believers. Cf. The Interorthodox Preparatory Commission, "Economy in the Orthodox Church," in Preparatory Commission of the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church 1971, *Towards a Great Council: Introductory Reports of the Interorthodox Commission in Preparation for the Next Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church* (London: SPCK, 1973) 39-54, 44.

<sup>43</sup> George A. Maloney, "Validation of Catholic and Orthodox Ministry," *Diakonia* 8 (1973) 155-163, 157.

<sup>44</sup> A Nihal, "Sacraments—An insight from the Orthodox Church," 253.

make us by the power of His Holy Spirit, sons of God and co-heirs with Him.”<sup>45</sup> It means that the economy of God constitutes the definitive foundation for the economy of the Church.<sup>46</sup> In other words, there is a fundamental connection between divine economy and the economy of the Church and this relationship is really consisting in the continuance of the salvation by Christ through the Church. It designates that the complete works of the Church are part of the divine economy.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the doctrine of economy is well set within a theological and ecclesial context. The theological context is the concept of the condescending love of God in the Incarnation of the Son, which is at present disclosed to the Church. “The ecclesial context is that the Church is constituted the one and only treasury of God’s grace and consequently the need for her to adapt herself as a good administrator of this treasury to the human situation especially in her sacramental discipline.”<sup>48</sup> Therefore, it is essential to base the ecclesiastical economy, “a term for accommodating Church laws and disciplines

to adjust to the human situations for the good of souls,” firmly on the economy of God.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, *oikonomia* or economy could be elucidated as the outstanding continuance of the divine purpose in the redemptive incarnation of Christ, revealed by the Saviour, emulated by the Apostles, and applied by the Church throughout the centuries.<sup>50</sup>

The divine economy is based on the Incarnation of the Divine Son for the salvation of the world and its continued application by the Holy Spirit through His Church; the economy of the Word and the sacraments whose charge has been given to the Apostles and their successors, and finally and more restrictively, the regulation of ecclesiastical life and order according to the circumstances and needs of a particular time and place.<sup>51</sup>

This statement by Maloney could serve as a summary to different dimensions of the principle of *oikonomia*, and explains how the divine economy and the ecclesiastical economy are intrinsically connected.

<sup>45</sup> George A. Maloney, “Validation of Catholic and Orthodox Ministry,” 157.

<sup>46</sup> Dumitru Staniloae, “The Economy of Salvation and Ecclesiastical ‘Economia,’” *Diakonia* 5 (1970) 115-125, 116.

<sup>47</sup> Liviu Stan, “Economy and Intercommunion,” *Diakonia* 6 (1971) 202-220, 204.

<sup>48</sup> A Nihal, “Sacraments—An insight from the Orthodox Church,” 253.

<sup>49</sup> George A. Maloney, “The Principle of Economy: A Corrective of Christian Mercy,” *Diakonia* 26 (1993) 119-133, 120.

<sup>50</sup> K. Duchatelez, “La notion d’économie et ses richesses théologiques,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 92 (1970) 291. See also James A. Coriden, “Rules for Interpreters,” 286.

<sup>51</sup> George A. Maloney, “The Principle of Economy: A Corrective of Christian Mercy,” 121. Maloney has drawn out these basic aspects from the book of Hamilcar S. Alivizatos, *H Oikonomia kata kanonikon Diaikon tes Orthodoxou Ecclesias* (Athens, 1949).



## Drawing Inspiration from the Scripture

This ecclesiastical economy has been explained and set by the local and ecumenical councils in accordance with the Scripture, tradition and the teachings of the fathers of the Church. The contemporary theological explanations to the notion given by Orthodox theologians and the practice of the principle by the Autocephalous Churches are also decisive in the development of the concept. Based on this background the Interorthodox Preparatory Commission makes clear its idea regarding the source and foundation of the principle of ecclesiastical economy:

The origin and basis of ecclesiastical economy is the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ and His entire work of redemption, which started at the Incarnation as an act of divine condescension and philanthropy. Ecclesiastical economy takes its origin from the spirit of God's love and mercy towards men and is governed by the same spirit, in the words of our Saviour: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not die, but have everlasting life' (John 3.16) and 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice (Matt. 9.13).<sup>52</sup>

This is the scriptural basis of the principle of ecclesiastical economy. This aspect is that which renders the principle as continuation of the saving work of Jesus Christ through the Church. The fathers of the Church have employed the term *oikonomia* mostly in this scriptural sense of "God's condescending to man in Incarnation."<sup>53</sup> There are many references in fathers in which the incarnation is presented as the "mystery or the sacrament of the economy," or described as "the great mystery of the economy."<sup>54</sup>

The Apostles also accomplished, by the gift of the sanctifying grace and different means of salvation, the saving of the strayed souls through either *akribeia* or *oikonomia*. The leading principle for them in this matter has been the thought that it is through the incarnation and the death of Jesus that God wants 'all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth' (1 Tim 2:4). Taking the example of the Apostles the leaders of the Church carried out the task of solving the problematic situations of the first centuries related to the saving works of the Church. The main principle practised in the exercise of the economy has been to avert the closing of the possibility of salvation to anyone (1 Tim 2:4, Acts 14:27). Therefore, doors are

<sup>52</sup> The Interorthodox Preparatory Commission, "Economy in the Orthodox Church," 42.

<sup>53</sup> For Incarnation as an act of divine condescension and philanthropy see Athanasius, *Letters to Serapion*, IV, 14, PG 26, 656, xvi, 39; *Commentary on the Pss. LXVII and LXXI*, PG 27, 300, 325; Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, xvii, 39, PG 32, 140 and xviii, 18, PG 32, 100, 140; Cyril of Alexandria, *Against Nestorius*, bk. I, i, 4ff, PG 76, 16, 17, 40ff; *On the Trinity*, xiv, PG 77, 1149; *Exegesis of the XII Anathemas and the Defence of the XII Anathemas*, PG 36, 300, 301, 304, 320ff; Theodotus of Ancyra, *On the Nicene Creed*, 2, 5, 7, PG 77, 1317, 1324; Maximus the Confessor, *Two Hundred Chapters*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, 18, PG, 90, 1133; Anastasius of Sinai, *On the Economies*, I, PG, 89, 85; John of Damascus, *Exposition*, bk. III, i, PG, 94, 984.

<sup>54</sup> The Quinisext Ecumenical Council, Canon 1.

open before the strayed ones to return to the Church. Following the spirit of the Apostles the synodal and patristic canons use the term *oikonomia* to depict the condescension of the Church.<sup>55</sup>

There are other scriptural foundations according to which this kind of accommodation is practiced and leniency is shown. Jesus Christ himself is presented as showing the mercy in opposition to the law of the time or as a divergence from it. He demonstrated by example that law does not constitute an end in itself. He often heals people on the sabbath (Mk 3: 1-5; John 5: 1-17; John 7:23). There is the emphatic statement of Jesus that "the sabbath was made for the good of man; man was not made for the sabbath" (Mk 3: 25-27). There is also the exhortation to human beings practice mercy in the parable of the intolerant servant: "you should have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I have had mercy on you" (Mt 18:33). Acts 10: 19-20 reveals how James at the first Council of Jerusalem has applied economy to the Gentiles: "It is my opinion that we should not trouble the gentiles who are turning to God." Paul is permitting

believers to remarry if the first unbelieving partner will not allow the other spouse his/her free observance of Christian faith (1Cor 7:15).<sup>56</sup>

### Who Is Entitled to Exercise Economy?

It is fundamental to the theology of the Orthodox Church that it is Christ, as the *oikonomos*, who exercises his *oikonomia* in and through the Church. However, it is through different ministries of the Church, through the Sacred Ministry, and, on top of all, the Apostolic Episcopate, that Christ exercises economy in particular. Therefore, the Church is having the role of a treasurer (*tamiouchos*).<sup>57</sup> Because of this stewardship in her own household and in her exercise of economy the act of *philanthropia* (loving-kindness) must relax *akribeia* for the good of human souls and for her own goodness, every time there are such demands and in which the condescension is possible.<sup>58</sup> Douglas gives a citation from Theophylact of Bulgaria as to show the exact nature of the exercise of economy: "He who does anything by Economy, does not do it as being good in itself, but as being needful for the occasion."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> The Interorthodox Preparatory Commission, "Economy in the Orthodox Church," 42-43.

<sup>56</sup> George A. Maloney, "The Principle of Economy: A Corrective of Christian Mercy," 121.

<sup>57</sup> In the opinion of Hamilkar S. Alivizatos, the Church is not *tamiouchos* or treasurer, rather, a steward or *oikonomos* of the sacraments. Therefore, she is only an instrument of grace, and has no control over it. Cf. Hamilkar S. Alivizatos, *The Oikonomia According to the Canon Law of the Orthodox Church* (in Greek) (Athens: 1949) 42-43. See also Constantine N. Tsiapanlis, "Doctrinal 'Oikonomia' and Sacramental Koinonia in Greek Patristic Theology and Contemporary Orthodox Ecumenism," *The Patristic and Byzantine Review* 6 (1987) 30-43, 42.

<sup>58</sup> J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy and Its Exercise," 91-92.

<sup>59</sup> Theophylact of Bulgaria, *Comment. Epist. Gal. V*. Douglas warns that "it should be remembered that Orthodox theology has not been systematized and formulated as Latin theology has been, and that in this matter Orthodox writers of authority at times diverge from each other in their premises, their treatment and conclusions." Cf. J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy and Its Exercise," 91.



Thus, the *oikonomos*, the one who exercises economy and in most cases a bishop, takes care of the household of God, the Church.<sup>60</sup> As the one who possesses the apostolic succession the bishop by being the *oikonomos* or chief steward of the household of faith has the appointed task of administering the divine economy. In accordance with this duty "his pastoral judgments are to mete out the inexhaustible riches of God according to the actual need and in the best interest of each person whom he serves. On occasion he may even decide for "leniency," for making an exception to an objectively important rule, when rigid observance of the standard would probably hinder instead of help an individual's growth toward salvation."<sup>61</sup>

The instantaneous judgment regarding a particular economy to be applied in a specific case remains with the one who exercises it. However, by applying economy when *akribeia* is needed to be loosened by *philanthropia*, its relaxation should not be the arbitrary action of an individual. Therefore, while there is a compelling emergency a bishop must utilize his own prudence and in doing likewise he should keep in mind that

he acts as the *oikonomos* of the Church. The one who exercises economy should not do it in a manner, which will eventually force him to think that he would not have been authorised by those to whom he is subordinate.<sup>62</sup> Douglas speaks about the role and directives of the higher authorities in the matter of exercising economy.

Except by the authority of an Oecumenical Council, or at least of the unanimous consent of the Synods of all the autocephalous Churches, Economy cannot rightly be exercised even by a Patriarch in Synod or the Synod of a single Church, in regard to the Canons of the Oecumenical Councils and the traditional common law and customs of the whole Orthodox Church. Again, no individual bishop, and probably not even a Patriarch, would be right to exercise Economy in a manner which was disapproved by the Synod of his particular Church. Nor would a priest or layman be right to do so in a manner which their bishop would disapprove. *Philanthropia* can justify Economy only so long as it does not produce *anomia*.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Ladislav Ůrsy, "In Search of the meaning of Oikonomia: Report on a Convention," 316-317. See also James A. Coriden, "Rules for Interpreters," 285. Bishop is also viewed as a physician, who heals with appropriate medicaments in legitimate doses the souls that are coming to him as sinners and sick. Cf. John H. Erickson, "Oikonomia in Byzantine Canon Law," 230. According to Metropolitan Anthony, the reception into the Orthodox Church is mainly dependent on the pastoral discretion of the local bishop and this discretion should be conditioned by the common good of the Church. Cf. Metropolitan Anthony, "Why the Anglican Clergy could be received in their Orders," *The Christian East* VIII (1921) 60-69, 68.

<sup>61</sup> John G. Yockey, "Economic Mercy for All," 80.

<sup>62</sup> J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy and Its Exercise," 92-93.

<sup>63</sup> J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy and Its Exercise," 93.

Thus, the Synod of the particular church is entitled to regulate the exercise and procedures regarding economy. If there needs to be a relaxation of *akribeia* regarding the sacraments which will be binding for the whole Orthodox Church then the Ecumenical Council is the only authority to do it. Depending on the nature of the case, the synodical authority of an autocephalous Church is also capable to impose mandatory regulations in its jurisdiction for the exercise or non-exercise of economies concerning the sacraments which have been justified by traditional precedents or by the decree of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. The exercise of economy with regard to sacraments, which was not really justified even by a Patriarch, could be considered as temerarious.<sup>64</sup>

The basic meaning of *oikonomia*, management or arrangement, which has often been discarded from the secondary literature, plays an important role in deciding the performer of the principle of economy in the opinion of John Erickson. In the canonical texts this term is regularly used to denote to an arrangement or determination by a synod of bishops regarding the management of a problem. Moreover, it denotes a bishop's management or administration of a diocese or other

particular instances of managing. Therefore, bishop is an *oikonomos*, a manager or a steward. Here, it means that a bishop is "the steward or manager of the high-priestly grace, responsible for the pastoral care of his flock, the supervision of his church's sacramental life."<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, he is the one who is entitled to exercise economy in the Church.

There are also other views that even a pastor should be allowed to exercise the principle of economy. Florovsky considers the principle of economy more of a pastoral activity and therefore all who are entitled to exercise pastoral duties should exercise economy. According to him, "economy can and should be employed by each individual pastor in his parish, still more by a bishop or council of bishops. For 'economy' is pastorship and pastorship is 'economy.'"<sup>66</sup> However, there are not many scholars who subscribe to this view of Florovsky.

Although the authority in the exercise of economy, especially in matters of great importance, rests with the synod of bishops of each local church, this authority can be delegated to individual bishops as well. The Ecumenical Synod, as supreme administrative, legislative and judicial body in the Church, administers ultimate authority in the exercise of economy. It alone can alter

<sup>64</sup> J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy and Its Exercise," 95.

<sup>65</sup> John Erickson, "The '*oikonomia*' of Orders in Byzantine Canon Law," in Stephen Kuttner and Kenneth Pennington (eds.), *Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Medieval Canon Law 1980*, Monumenta Iuris Canonici, Series C. Subsidia Vol. 7 (Vaticana: Citadel Vaticano, 1984) 259-270, 261; John H. Erickson, *The Challenge of Our Past*, 118.

<sup>66</sup> George Florovsky, "The Limits of the Church," 120.



or overrule the decision of any subordinate ecclesiastical authority.<sup>67</sup> Regional synods of bishops determine the multifaceted matter of approving the ordination of a non-Orthodox bishop within their area of jurisdiction. The determining factor in its application, however, must always be the spiritual welfare of the recipient or the penitent. Therefore, "economy is the concession by legitimate pastors of a certain kind of compromise which, safeguarding both dogma and divine law, involves a mitigated rather than strict application of norms for the sake of the salvation of the faithful."<sup>68</sup> This aspect of dogma is of utmost importance with regard to the determination of the scope of the exercise of economy and the related limits.

### The Scope and Limits of Economy

In deciding the scope of economy the norm should be to consider it as "an aspect

of pedagogical rather than canonical consciousness." This is the whole vigour and vivacity of the principle of economy and also its limitations. Therefore, "not every question can be asked and answered in terms of 'economy'.<sup>69</sup> In an extreme case of necessity, the Church is allowed to exercise economy only with regard to the laws and customs that have been decided by the Church herself. A change in the law for that particular instance is permissible. However, the Church cannot exercise economy regarding to that which Christ Himself has revealed and ordained. It means that the exercise of economy is not possible in the realm of dogma and faith.<sup>70</sup> This is in fact the position of Euloghios of Alexandria, who holds the idea that "man's reason uses *oikonomia* when the dogma of faith is not wronged."<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the supreme requirement for exercising economy is that it should not in any sense compromise or seems to compromise the dogmatic

<sup>67</sup> George A. Maloney, "The Principle of Economy: A Corrective of Christian Mercy," 123-124; James A. Coriden, "Rules for Interpreters," 286.

<sup>68</sup> James A. Coriden, "Rules for Interpreters," 286.

<sup>69</sup> George Florovsky, "The Limits of the Church," 120-121.

<sup>70</sup> A Nihal, "Sacraments -An insight from the Orthodox Church," 254; Frank Gavin, *Some Aspects of the Contemporary Greek Orthodox Thought*, 297. However, there are authors and experts who claim that *oikonomia* belongs to the category of dogma and has something to do with it, though not affecting dogma. Liviu Stan includes the principle of *oikonomia* along with the principles that claim dogmatic content or a dogmatic basis. This could be explained as legal and canonical expressions of dogmatic truths. He speaks about two specific aspects of economy as dogmatic and canonical. Cf. Liviu Stan, "Economy and Intercommunion," 206; Bartholomeos Archondonis, "The Problem of Oikonomia Today," *Kanon* VI (1983) 39-50, 42. Hamilkar S. Alivizatos opines that "it is doubtful if even the dogmatic limits remain unchanged through economy, because, among other things, the recognition by economy of the sacraments of non-Orthodox Churches touches necessarily the limits of dogma, within which also the sacraments and the dogmatic teaching on them are included." Hamilkar S. Alivizatos, *Economy from the Orthodox Point of View* (in Greek) (Athens, 1949) 21. See also Bartholomeos Archondonis, "The Problem of Oikonomia Today," 42.

<sup>71</sup> Euloghios of Alexandria, *Sermon* 227, PG 103, 953. See also Bartholomeos Archondonis, "The Problem of Oikonomia Today," 42.

tradition of the Church.<sup>72</sup> Maloney points out the limits of exercising economy from the point of view of the fundamental principles of dogma and of Christian morality with a few concrete examples: "The Church cannot give rights to Holy Communion to a heretic who denies the doctrine of the Eucharist. The indissolubility of marriage must be maintained until a canonical investigation can determine that a first marriage no longer is a living sign of Christ loving His Church. Validation of orders through economy requires apostolic succession at least and preferably also a canonically correct administration of that sacrament."<sup>73</sup> Another factor of serious importance is that economy cannot overrule dogma. Economy cannot declare something to be a sacrament which according to dogma is not a sacrament. It cannot also overrule a sacrament which dogma announces to be a sacrament. Consequently, *akribeia* does not recommend

"the repetition of Baptism, Confirmation and Orders administered outside the Church because they can be pronounced dogmatically to be no sacraments. It prescribes it because, according to the measure of heresy and the guilt of schism, the administration of sacraments outside the Church becomes deficient, and for that reason the Church cannot regard them as valid *per se*."<sup>74</sup> However, this dogmatic deficiency is completed by the "reception of individual heretics and schismatics into Communion by the Church in the exercise of her power as *tamiouchos*." Douglas reasons that if that was not the case, the Third and Seventh Councils could not have relaxed the Canons of the Apostles and the fathers must have continued the application of *akribeia*. It is in this manner that the Orthodox Church conforms itself as continuing the tradition of the Fathers in applying economy and receiving the repentant converts who meet the terms of her

<sup>72</sup> J. A. Douglas, *The Relations of the Anglican Churches with the Eastern-Orthodox* (London: Faith Press, 1921) 55; J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy and Its Exercise," 93. Opposing to the idea held by Douglas, Francis J. Thomson states that "rejection or acceptance of the validity of any sacrament must include some doctrine of sacramental grace, not to mention a doctrine of the limits of the Church, and thus does belong to the realm of dogma." Cf. Francis J. Thomson, "Economy: An Examination of the Various Theories of Economy held within the Orthodox Church, with Special Reference to the Economical Recognition of the Validity of the Non-Orthodox Sacraments," *Journal of Theological Studies* 16 (1965) 368-420, 368. According to Constantine N. Tsirpanlis, the interpretations and positions of Eugenicus and Pegas even when holding firm to the patristic tradition of "not allowing essential dogmatic compromise," have accepted a "certain freedom and reasonable flexibility in the terminological expression and clarification of the dogma once the essentials of Faith had been preserved." Cf. Constantine N. Tsirpanlis, "Doctrinal 'Oikonomia' and Sacramental Koinonia in Greek Patristic Theology and Contemporary Orthodox Ecumenism," 31.

<sup>73</sup> George A. Maloney, "The Principle of Economy: A Corrective of Christian Mercy," 123. The importance is given to the factors of doctrine and faith. If faith and doctrine are lacking, no matter how the rite is performed, it will not be considered as conferring grace and therefore is invalid. However, where there is the upholding of the doctrine and faith it is believed to have the possibility to visualize grace and it becomes the duty of the Church to identify this grace in order to validate the rite through which this grace is conferred. Cf. A. Nihal, "Sacraments—An insight from the Orthodox Church," 255.

<sup>74</sup> J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy, and Its Exercise," 94.



communion in their Baptism, Confirmation and Orders. Making a decision whether there is any need for them to receive baptism, confirmation and ordination remains at the discretion of the Church.<sup>75</sup> There are two norms according to which her verdict in the matter is decided: "by the degree of the heresy and the hostility to herself of the Communion from which they come to her and ... by the measure in which the canonical requirements of the sacraments have been preserved in that Communion." The economy could be freely applied when there is an almost precise resemblance to Orthodox dogmatic position with regard to the sacrament in question and where the fundamentals of the external canonical acts are complied with, and where there is a desire to come to the bosom of Orthodoxy.<sup>76</sup> Based on the views of Dyovouniotes and Androutsos, Gavin puts forward the same argument that in the application of the principle of economy together with the faith of those heretics and schismatics who want to come back the Church also considers their perspectives on the sacraments, especially orders and baptism. The canonicity of the administration of the sacraments and the

uninterrupted succession of the episcopal authority dating back from the time of Apostles are also of importance in this regard.<sup>77</sup> Apostolic Succession is, therefore, one of the basic requirements in the exercise of economy.

The application of economy has been limited by the basic rules regarding faith, which cannot be breached because of extreme liberalism or lack of concern or excessive rigorism. There are three principal reasons for permitting economy: the salvation of human beings, the good order of the Church and avoiding scandal.<sup>78</sup> The principle of economy is applied in an instance where the application of the law with strictness would be a hindrance to the fundamental mission of the Church, the salvation of the soul. In reality the content of the economy itself is Church's pardoning of the sins and errors committed by its members who are ardently willing to return to it in order to attain the restoration of complete Christian life. Therefore, economy is applied when a soul is under the threat of losing salvation because of an unpardonable sin that has been committed.<sup>79</sup> It should be

<sup>75</sup> J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy, and Its Exercise," 94-95.

<sup>76</sup> J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy, and Its Exercise," 95.

<sup>77</sup> Frank Gavin, *Some Aspects of the Contemporary Greek Orthodox Thought*, (New York: AMS Press, 1970) 298. The position of Dyovouniotes and Androutsos, however, is that even though the Orthodox Church does not recognize the sacraments of those Christian denominations for whom the Apostolic Succession has been broken, it does not mean that she cannot recognize them by economy. Cf. Francis J. Thomson, "Economy: An Examination of the Various Theories of Economy held within the Orthodox Church, with Special Reference to the Economical Recognition of the Validity of the Non-Orthodox Sacraments," 375.

<sup>78</sup> George A. Maloney, "The Principle of Economy: A Corrective of Christian Mercy," 122. He depends on Hamilkar S. Alivizatos for these three reasons.

<sup>79</sup> George A. Maloney, "The Principle of Economy: A Corrective of Christian Mercy," 123.

noted that each and every specific exercise of economy is independent. Therefore, one of the main features of economy is that no precedent could bind any decision by this principle. The presence or absence of the precedent instances of applying economy may have influence only on the judgment of the one who is expected to decide whether or not to exercise it. However, precedents can never bind that decision.<sup>80</sup> When the particular instance of applying economy is over the *akribeia* or the strictness of the law is restored.

Regarding the scope and extent of economy being applied in the realm of sacraments there is no unanimity among the experts in the Orthodox Church. The general rule is that there should be strict observance of the law. However, in those instances where the application of the exactness of the law is not possible due to grave pastoral reasons one can adhere to the principle of economy.<sup>81</sup> After making a study on different positions on the scope of the application of economy regarding sacraments by different Greek

theologians, Francis J. Thomson comes to the following conclusion:

It is evident that no clear idea of economy can be obtained. The results can be thus tabulated in four main groups: (a) Economy can make what is invalid to be valid and what is valid to be invalid (Androutsos, Dyovouniotes). (b) Economy can make what is valid to be invalid but not what is invalid to be valid (Patriarch Meletios). (c) Economy cannot make what is valid to be invalid but can make what is invalid to be valid (Georgiadis). (d) Economy can neither make what is valid to be invalid nor what is invalid to be valid (Amvrasis, Alivizatos).<sup>82</sup>

This tabulation really gives evidence that how much difference is there among the scholars of the same Church regarding a theological principle and its nature, scope and limits. In the modern presentations of the principle of economy these explicit differences are very common in every aspect of it. In a sense, these different theories really

<sup>80</sup> George A. Maloney, "The Principle of Economy: A Corrective of Christian Mercy," 124; J. A. Douglas, "The Orthodox Principle of Economy and Its Exercise," 92.

<sup>81</sup> A Nihal, "Sacraments—An insight from the Orthodox Church," 254.

<sup>82</sup> Francis J. Thomson, "Economy: An Examination of the Various Theories of Economy held within the Orthodox Church, with Special Reference to the Economical Recognition of the Validity of the Non-Orthodox Sacraments," 384. See also George A. Maloney, "Validation of Catholic and Orthodox Ministry," 158; A Nihal, "Sacraments—An insight from the Orthodox Church," 254. According to Maloney, "the broadest position among the Greeks is held by H. Alivizatos who asserted that orders of the Roman Catholic were per se recognized as valid. The reason was that in ordination a special charisma was conferred upon the recipient which the Church, as the steward of sacraments, could neither take away nor confer, since it is belonged to God alone and was conferred by the Holy Spirit...To use economy for Alivizatos was not to concern oneself with validity in regard to Catholics but merely to lift the ban upon the use of these sacraments within the Orthodox community." Cf. George A. Maloney, "Validation of Catholic and Orthodox Ministry," 158; Hamilcar S. Alivizatos, *To Kiroi tes hierosines tes Anglikanikes Ecclesias* (Athens: 1940) 111-113.



obscure the potential possibility of a perfect definition of the principle. This vague nature of the principle of economy resulting from the divergence regarding its content, scope and limits has led to many convenient interpretations. With regard to the recognition of the sacraments of the heretics, especially baptism, K. Karnapas tries to define the limits of economy by examining the preservation of three main factors by the heretics: "(a) right faith in Trinity, (b) the 'essence' of the sacrament, and (c) the canonical celebration of it."<sup>83</sup> However, according to some authors the Church has got the full authority to decide on economy which is very broad. Canellopulos' definition of economy is such a liberal one: "The Church is the authoritative body which can freely regulate her policy towards her means of grace and interpret them, not of course contrary to the word of God expressly commanded in the New testament, but independently of any particular view which may prevail at any time, in such a way as to meet the needs of the time."<sup>84</sup> The lack of systematic presentation of the principle of economy has led to different perspectives on the practice of this principle both stringent and liberal.

## St. Basil the Great: The Proponent of the Principle of Economy

Saint Basil seems to be the first one who has unambiguously depended on the principle of economy as a traditional procedure in dealing with certain existing procedures.<sup>85</sup> During the period of heresies and schisms there emerged a dilemmatic situation to decide whether it is with greater or lesser severity the course of action to be taken against the schismatics. There was the greater need to protect the congregation from their negative inspirations. There are cases in which strictness has been fundamentally effective and in other circumstances the concession and toleration, as drawn out from *oikonomia* as the condescending mercy of God. These two approaches could be found in the first canon of St. Basil and are termed as strictness and economy. St. Basil speaks about a "certain discretion" in a way projected for the formation in the Church. Therefore, economy should not be considered as an absolute concession. This principle is further elucidated with meticulous completeness and clarity in the canon 102 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, with reference to the

<sup>83</sup> Francis J. Thomson, "Economy: An Examination of the Various Theories of Economy held within the Orthodox Church, with Special Reference to the Economical Recognition of the Validity of the Non-Orthodox Sacraments," 376.

<sup>84</sup> C. Canellopulos, "Christian Reunion from the Point of View of the Eastern Orthodox Church," *Church Quarterly Review* XCVI (1923) 247-305, 274. See also Francis J. Thomson, "Economy: An Examination of the Various Theories of Economy held within the Orthodox Church, with Special Reference to the Economical Recognition of the Validity of the Non-Orthodox Sacraments," 377.

<sup>85</sup> George A. Maloney, "The Principle of Economy: A Corrective of Christian Mercy," 122.

"art of spiritual healing". It has been there stated that:

All that matters to God and to the person undertaking pastoral leadership consists in the recovery of the straying sheep, and in healing the one wounded by the serpent. Accordingly, he ought not to drive the patient to the verge of despair, nor give him rein to dissoluteness and contempt of life, but, on the contrary, in at least one way at any rate, either by resorting to extreme and stringent remedies, or to gentler and milder ones, to curb the disease, and to put up a fight to heal the ulcer for the one tasting the fruits of repentance, and wisely helping him on the way to the splendid rehabilitation to which the man is being invited.<sup>86</sup>

This explication reveals that the ecclesiastical economy could in some circumstances demand strictness and in other cases concession.<sup>87</sup>

It could be said that the principles of sacramental theology, intrinsic to the first canon of Basil, are really emerged openly from the African and Cappadocian discipline and ecclesiology of the second half of the third century in matters of rebaptism. Cyprian

of Carthage and the predecessor of Basil, Firmilian of Caesarea apply both these names schism and heresy for the same dissident groups. However, Basil has really distinguished between schism and heresy stating "schism is to be at variance regarding penance with those belonging to the church," and makes a considerably different use of it, though not opposing them.<sup>88</sup> By making this apparent difference between heresy and schism Basil tries to provide a pastoral solution for the issue of admitting heretics and schismatics: "inasmuch however, as it has seemed best to those in the regions of Asia for the sake of extraordinary concession (or 'economy') to the many, to accept their baptism let it be accepted."<sup>89</sup> It means that while regarding their baptism as invalid, for the sake of practical intention regarding faith, Basil identifies the prospect of receiving them without having re-baptism, however, only with renouncing of their heresy. It should be noted that Basil really reaffirms the Cyprianic principle regarding the invalidity of baptism by heretics.<sup>90</sup> It shows that only in the context of *akribeia* that *oikonomia* is possible. He explicates similarly the inadmissibility of the baptism of the Encratites, the gnostic heretics. He speaks about the absence of grace in the

<sup>86</sup> *The Sixth Ecumenical Council*, Canon 102.

<sup>87</sup> George Grabbe, "Strictness and Economy," *Orthodox Russia* 22 (1978) 1-3, 1.

<sup>88</sup> Andre de Halleux, "'Oikonomia' in the First Canon of Saint Basil," 60-61; Tamara Grdzeldze, "Using the Principle of *Oikonomia* in Ecumenical Discussions: Reflections on 'the Limits of the Church' by George Florovsky," 238 and 240.

<sup>89</sup> St. Basil, *Letters* 3, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Cambridge, Mass., London: Loeb Classical Library, 1962) 17. See also John Erickson, "The '*oikonomia*' of Orders in Byzantine Canon Law," 263.

<sup>90</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 88. Cf. Saint Basil the Great, *Ep. ad Amphiloichium*, PG 32: 669 b.



baptism of the Cathari whom "the ancients ordered to be cleansed anew by a true Church baptism." His reasoning regarding this is that the baptism as it has been determined by the ancients shall not diverge from faith. Basil here gives value to the content of the performed sacrament. However, he continues to add: "If, however, this becomes an obstacle to (God's) general *oikonomia*, one should again refer to custom and follow the Fathers who managed the Church. For I am inclined to suspect that we may by the severity of the proposition actually prevent men from being saved because of their being too indolent in regard to baptism."<sup>91</sup> Basil, thus, accepts the baptism of Cathari and Encratites. It is clear that Basil accepts economy because of the fear that too much strictness is really a hindrance to the salvation of many.<sup>92</sup> Accordingly, Basil avoids the Cyprianic rigidity, differing with the assertion that all "who had broken away from the church no longer had in them the grace of the Holy Spirit."<sup>93</sup> Basil asserts that "the grace of the Holy Spirit operates in those who have broken away from the church. With a will to find a flexible ecclesiological breadth in Orthodox sacramental theology, one may follow Basil's line even while overlooking the context in which it arose, namely, the fact that

Basil spoke thus in favour of the baptism of schismatics who erred but still were of the church."<sup>94</sup> Thus, the dismissal of the argument of Cyprian regarding the invalidity of baptism carried out outside the Church could be found existing in the position of Basil. However, that disagreement is evident only after the application of economy, because it is Cyprian's principle of the invalidity of the sacraments outside Church that makes Basil's principle of economy to function in a difficult circumstance of *akribeia*. Basil considers that the dismissal or reception of any baptism depends on the assessment of each particular case and situation.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, it can be stated that Basil's explication regarding the possibility of the practice of economy is both strict and compromising at the same time with regard to the heretics who have been deprived of all grace.

It should be taken into consideration that a ceremonial by a heretical group, even though it fully imitates the Orthodox Baptism to the letter, is considered invalid because it does not join the one who has been baptized to the Body of Christ. Leniency may be shown because of a person's limitation or the requirements of the times, so that full baptism may not be required for those who

<sup>91</sup> Saint Basil the Great, *Ep. ad Amphiloichium*, PG 32: 669 b. (Letter to Amphiloichius).

<sup>92</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 89; George A. Maloney, "The Principle of Economy: A Corrective of Christian Mercy," 122.

<sup>93</sup> Tamara Grdzeldze, "Using the Principle of Oikonomia in Ecumenical Discussions: Reflections on 'the Limits of the Church' by George Florovsky," *The Ecumenical Review* 56 (2004) 234-246, 240-241.

<sup>94</sup> Tamara Grdzeldze, "Using the Principle of Oikonomia in Ecumenical Discussions: Reflections on 'the Limits of the Church' by George Florovsky," 241.

<sup>95</sup> Tamara Grdzeldze, "Using the Principle of Oikonomia in Ecumenical Discussions: Reflections on 'the Limits of the Church' by George Florovsky," 238.

desire to attach themselves to the Church if they have undergone an apparently Orthodox rite. However, leniency never implies that the heterodox ceremony is a true baptism,<sup>96</sup> because, the economy is exercised only for a circumstance in which the sacrament performed is invalid according to the strict rules of the Church.

### Application of *Oikonomia* in Marriage Practices

The reception of schismatics and heretics, the recognition of sacraments in matters of intercommunion, and the reception of the repentant clergy and consequent orders are pastoral contexts of the application of the principle of *oikonomia* along with the problem of divorce and remarriage. However, this essay, here deals with the principle of economy only in the context of marriage and divorce.

According to John Meyendorff, *oikonomia* occupies a significant role in the Byzantine marriage law.

This law... aims fundamentally at expressing and protecting the notion that the unique Christian marriage, a sacramental reality, is projected – "in reference to Christ and the Church" (Eph 5:32) – into the eternal Kingdom of God. Marriage, therefore, is not simply a contract, which is indissoluble

only while both parties remain in this world, but an eternal relationship not broken by death. In accordance with St. Paul (1Cor 7:8-9), a second marriage is tolerated, but not considered "legitimate" in itself, whether it is concluded after the death of one partner or after a divorce. In both cases, it is tolerated twice only "by economy," as a lesser evil, while fourth marriage is excluded.<sup>97</sup>

Before engaging with this aspect of the application of the economy on marriage problems there is the need to understand the Orthodox perspective on marriage, divorce and remarriage.

### The Orthodox Understanding of Marriage as a Sacrament

The Orthodox theology of the marriage and family reiterates often the patristic concept that "where Christ is, there is the Church." This statement makes evident the ecclesial character of a marriage relationship. The Pauline definition of marriage is fundamental here and marriage acquires its sanctity from this symbolising activity: "a great mystery in Christ and in the Church" (Eph 5:32). There is also the great concept of the "domestic church," of John Chrysostom concerning family and marriage.<sup>98</sup> The mutual love of husband and wife is a communal love of God and they in

<sup>96</sup> Patrick Barnes, *The Non-Orthodox: The Orthodox Teaching on Christians Outside the Church* (Salisbury, MA: Regina Orthodox Press, 1999) 173.

<sup>97</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Themes and Doctrinal Trends*, 89.

<sup>98</sup> Homily 20, on Ephesians; PG, 62, 143.



their life in every moment glorify God. Therefore, Chrysostom states that "marriage is a mystical icon of the Church."<sup>99</sup> Because of these foundations marriage in its real meaning is a holy institution and the Church in viewing marriage as a divine institution and mystery preserves its holiness. It is on this holiness that the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage is based and the holiness and indissolubility of marriage acclaim monogamy.<sup>100</sup> It is not only the concurrence and free will of the man and woman that institutes the marriage, but also the grace of God in particular and according to the Orthodox understanding this grace is provided by the approval of the Church, especially in a person of higher authority.<sup>101</sup>

This is the ideal concept of a Christian marriage as a mystery or sacrament. However, because of the "fallen" situation of human beings this ideal marriage is often left unattainable. There is an essential distinction between a "sacrament" and an "ideal." The "sacrament" is "an experience involving not only man, but one in which he acts in

communion with God." Accordingly, in the Christian marriage human beings become partner with God and at the same time continue with their weaknesses and faults.<sup>102</sup> This idea is also in the frontline while adhering to the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage in the Orthodox concept of marriage. There is more of a pedagogical importance to the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage in the command of the Christ and therefore, those who come into the covenant of marriage ought to do everything not to split because it is God who has joined them. However, the command of Christ that "therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate," (Mk 10: 9 and Mt 19:6) does not indicate any magical adherence. Human beings are free to use their free will and if they act accordingly and break this command of Christ they sin. The Church has been throughout the centuries faithful to the teaching of St. Paul regarding second marriage as an aberration of the Christian decree. The Orthodox concept of marriage thus upholds the indissolubility of marriage

<sup>99</sup> John Chrysostom, *PG*, 62, 387.

<sup>100</sup> Athenagoras Peckstadt, "Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: *Economia* and Pastoral Guidance," International Congress Leuven (18-20 April 2005) 1-12, 4.

<sup>101</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *The Epistle to Polycarp* V. 2, in Coll. Sources Chrétiennes (Paris, 1958) 177. In his letter to Polycarp Ignatius of Antioch says that, "the men and women who marry, should enter into their unity with the approval of the bishop." Contrary to the Western position of considering the bride and bridegroom as the ministers of the sacrament of marriage, the Orthodox Church considers bishop or priest as the minister of the sacrament of marriage. Paul Evdokimov, after analysing the historical developments regarding the minister of the sacrament of marriage, states that it is the priest who ministers the sacrament of marriage though the approval and authorization of the bishop is essential too. Cf. Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel and Victoria Steadman (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001) 183-184.

<sup>102</sup> John Meyendorff, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective* (New York, 1975) 21. See also Athenagoras Peckstadt, "Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: *Economia* and Pastoral Guidance," 4.

and also its uniqueness. However, in the opinion of Zoghby in the East the Church interprets the clause "except in circumstances of adultery," (Mt 5:32 and 9:6) from the first centuries on in favour of possible remarriage for the innocent spouse.<sup>103</sup> These aspects are part of the tradition of the Church during the first centuries and that which has been taken and continued by the Orthodox Church. The uniqueness of the authentic Christian marriage and the permanence of married conjugal life are considered to be having their foundation in the fundamental analogy that St. Paul has made between the unity of Christ and his Church and that of the bride and bridegroom.<sup>104</sup> This comparison is the basis for the sacrament of marriage to presuppose a real and continuing unity of the married couple and accordingly rules out the possibility of concurrent polygamy. This analogy stresses the view of one single marriage as the ideal.<sup>105</sup> The uniqueness of marriage founded on the

concept of the sacramentality of marriage has been so influential, opines Meyendorff, that until the tenth century it was not allowed to bless the second marriage of those widowed or divorced in the church.<sup>106</sup>

### Divorce and Remarriage as Pastoral Concession

In the background of this Orthodox concept of marriage the problem of divorce has to be understood as a human reality that is very much painful and tormenting. Divorce is not the healing of a problematic marriage; rather it is the termination of it, which is not really a positive move. It is really the dissolution of the *ecclesia domestica* which is established through the sacrament of marriage.<sup>107</sup> However, taking into consideration the impact of fall and sin on the human nature the Orthodox Church permits divorce and remarriage on ground of the interpretation of Mt 19:9. However, remarriage has not been considered in high

<sup>103</sup> Archbishop Elias Zoghby, "The Indissolubility of Marriage," *Diakonia* 4 (1969) 156-161, 157. Zoghby was the Melkite Patriarchal Vicar for Egypt and this article is the speech he made at Vatican Council II.

<sup>104</sup> John Meyendorff speaks about the uniqueness of marriage as originating from the sacramental character of marriage. He holds the view that "the Byzantine theological, liturgical, and canonical tradition unanimously stresses the absolute uniqueness of Christian marriage, and bases this emphasis upon the teaching of Ephesians 5. As a sacrament, or *mysterion*, marriage reflects the union between Christ and the Church, between Yahweh and Israel, and as such can only be *one*—an eternal bond, which death itself does not destroy. In its sacramental nature, marriage transfigures and transcends both fleshly union and contractual legal association: human love is being projected into the eternal Kingdom of God." John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Themes and Doctrinal Trends*, 196-197.

<sup>105</sup> Athenagoras Peckstadt, "Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: *Oikonomia* and Pastoral Guidance," 5.

<sup>106</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Themes and Doctrinal Trends*, 197. Depending on the canons of Basil, the canon of Nicephorus the Confessor (806-815) speaks about the fact that the remarriage of the divorced and widowed could be concluded only as civil contacts. Cf. Nicephorus the Confessor, Canon 2, *Syntagma Canonum* IV, G. Rhalles and M. Potles (eds.), (Athens, 1854) 457.

<sup>107</sup> N. Matsoukas, *Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology* (Thessalonica: 1988) 497. See also Athenagoras Peckstadt, "Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: *oikonomia* and pastoral guidance," 5.



esteem. It was allowed only as a "concession to human weakness or natural necessity" and "not marriage as it had been established from the beginning."<sup>108</sup> Kallistos Ware writes, "since Christ, according to the Matthean account, allowed an exception to His general ruling about the indissolubility of marriage, the Orthodox Church also is willing to allow an exception."<sup>109</sup> He considers divorce as an

action of *oikonomia* and an "expression of compassion" of the Church toward sinful human beings.<sup>110</sup> The same idea is also expressed by Paul Evdokimov. He holds the view that "the East permits divorce as a divine dispensation, using as a basis the texts of Mt 5:32 and 19:9." He also considers St. Basil as the authority with regard to the question of divorce.<sup>111</sup> Patsavos adds 1Cor

<sup>108</sup> John H. Erickson, *The Challenge of Our Past: Studies in Orthodox Canon Law and Church History* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991) 42. Gregory of Nazianzen puts forward the Eastern rule regarding marriage as the following: "A first marriage is in full conformity with the law; the second is tolerated by indulgence; the third is noxious. But he who exceeds this number is plainly a swine." Gregory of Nazianzen, *Or.* 37.8, PG 36, 968.

<sup>109</sup> As quoted by Athenagoras Peckstadt. Cf. Athenagoras Peckstadt, "Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: *Economia* and Pastoral Guidance," 6. See also Timothy Ware, *L'Orthodoxie - l'Eglise des sept conciles* (Paris: 1997) 380-381.

<sup>110</sup> Athenagoras Peckstadt, "Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: *Economia* and Pastoral Guidance," 6.

<sup>111</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, 184. Cf. Saint Basil, *To Amphilochius*, Concerning the Canon, PG 32:677. Paul Evdokimov gives a long list of reasons and circumstances according to which this dispensation of annulling and divorce done. One of the causes is "the dissolution of the marriage bond for reason of adultery (of the wife). Civil legislation introduces other causes. The reasons are indicated by established practice: the adultery of the husband or the wife, the absence or the lack of news from one of the spouses for more than five years, civil death by condemnation. There is also the case where the husband is elevated to the episcopacy and he—or the wife—enters a monastery (at an advanced age). In such cases the marriage is annulled, although the other party does not receive the permission to remarry. Since 1877, the tribunal of the Patriarch of Constantinople reserves the right to grant a divorce for other reasons. In Russia, the Synod of Moscow, by decree of April 20, 1918, adds the following reasons: apostasy, a serious illness (leprosy, syphilis, self-mutilation), incurable folly, and other criminal abandonment of on party by the other. Thus the reasons of annulment are: the death of the very matter of sacrament (love) through adultery, religious death through apostasy, civil death through condemnation, and physical death through absence." Cf. Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, 184. The canonical collection of the Eastern Orthodox Church includes in it canons that are from the Novel 117 of Justinian, in 541, issued with the collaboration and agreement of the Church. According to these canons, the important causes for granting divorce are: 1. Crimes carrying with them the death penalty; 2. Events, the results of which are equivalent to natural death; 3. Adultery, or an act giving rise to suspicion of it; 4. Absence of the essential natural presupposition for the realization of marriage; 5. Election of the monastic life by one of the spouses. Cf. Lewis J. Patsavos, "The Orthodox Position on Divorce," *Diakonia* 5 (1970) 4-15, 8. Generally, divorce was not acceptable "without a valid reason." There was the idea of Justinian that "divorce must be the exclusive result of reasonable causes, expressly stated in law." This has been taken into the Byzantine legal norms. Therefore, "those divorcing without valid cause were subject to heavy penalties, at first monetary fines, but under Justinian, compulsory entrance into monasticism." Cf. John H. Erickson, *The Challenge of Our Past: Studies in Orthodox Canon Law and Church History*, 45.

7:39 also as scriptural basis for the dissolubility of marriage by the Orthodox Church in which death is the cause.<sup>112</sup>

Athenagoras Peckstadt brings in an argument upon which the Orthodox Church allows divorce and remarriage from the teachings of Eastern Church fathers. He states:

We need to be very clear in this as when Christ teaches that marriage *may not* be dissolved that does not mean that he is stating that it *cannot* occur. The completeness of the marriage relationship can be tinted by erroneous behaviour. In other words, it is the offence that breaks the bond. The divorce is ultimately a result of this break. This is also the teaching of the Eastern Church Fathers. A quotation from the testimony of Cyril of Alexandria will be sufficient to make our point here: "*It is not the letters of divorce that dissolve the marriage in relation to God but the errant behaviour.*"<sup>113</sup>

Paul Evdokimov clarifies this aspect based on the argument of Justinian that "matrimony becomes real only through love," because love is the matter of the sacrament. He continues to state that "divorce is but a declaration about the absence, the disappearance, the destruction of love, and

therefore it simply declares that a marriage does not exist. It is analogous to the act of excommunication; it is not a punishment, but a post factum determination of a separation that has already taken place."<sup>114</sup> Therefore, according to him, the Orthodox Church is in fact revealing its endless respect for the human person and for the sacrament of love by allowing divorce. There is a respect from the part of the Church towards an adult person and hence the Church acknowledges that it is the person who is the only judge of his life.<sup>115</sup>

It is obvious that the Orthodox understanding of marriage promotes the view that the unity of the married couple is not just the result of a juridical obligation. The formal unity must be consistent with an internal symphony. Accordingly, the Church comes into the awareness that there are circumstances of the lack of sacramental essence in marriage relations because of the lack of this internal symphony or lack of love. Evdokimov stresses the point that "the indissolubility of bond does not promote love. The question of divorce arises when there is nothing left to save; the bond declared indissoluble at the beginning is already broken, and the law has nothing that can replace grace. The law can neither heal nor

<sup>112</sup> Lewis J. Patsavos, "The Orthodox Position on Divorce," 9.

<sup>113</sup> Athenagoras Peckstadt, "Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: *Economia* and Pastoral Guidance," 6. Cf. PG 72, 380D.

<sup>114</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, 189.

<sup>115</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, 189.



restore to life, nor can it say, 'Arise, and walk.'<sup>116</sup> Therefore, the Orthodox Church identifies cases of marriage life that do not boast any content and also in danger of losing the soul. It is in these cases that the Church adheres to the teachings of John Chrysostom: "better to break the covenant than to lose one's soul."<sup>117</sup> However, it should be noted that the Orthodox Church does not consider divorce as a higher ideal; rather it is a tragedy that happens due to human weakness and sin. Patsavos comments that by approving divorce "the cause of divorce is regarded as revoking the ecclesial concept of marriage by negating its religious and moral foundation. In other words, it effects spiritual death."<sup>118</sup> Because of many causes this spiritual death regarding marriage has been taking place in marriage relationships. This spiritual death is equated with the fundamental teaching that a "validly contracted marriage is dissolved only by physical death." Accordingly, "divorce consequential to spiritual death emerges by

itself as soon as the foundation of marriage disappears and the purpose of conjugal union is frustrated. The competent ecclesiastical authority does not dissolve the marriage, but rather formally acknowledges that the legitimate marriage is without foundation and has been dissolved '*ipso facto*.'"<sup>119</sup>

In a case where marriage does not exist anymore as a reality the Orthodox Church permits a second marriage, and the guiding principle is that, even when condemning sin, it is the duty of the Church to provide help to those who suffer. Because of the human weaknesses a second marriage is allowed. This second marriage is allowed only as a pastoral concession in the context of *oikonomia*, to the human weakness.<sup>120</sup> The Orthodox tradition deals with the problem of remarriage, whether after divorce or widowhood, only as part of a penitential discipline. Meyendorff explains this point in detail:

Marriage, as a sacrament, implies the bestowing of God's grace; but this

<sup>116</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, 190. See also Athenagoras Peckstadt, "Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: *Economia* and Pastoral Guidance," 6. The argument of Evdokimov is so progressive and revolutionary at times especially when he claims that "the Yes they pronounced is valid only on the condition that they can say No at any moment."

<sup>117</sup> John Chrysostom, *PG*, 61, 155. See also Athenagoras Peckstadt, "Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: *Economia* and Pastoral Guidance," 6. John Chrysostom has a very subjective starting point speaking about marriage. When he speaks about the order and aims of marriage he begins with the subjective, the nuptial community rather than the objective procreation. Cf. John Chrysostom, *Hom.* 19, on Marriage, *PG* 51, 213.

<sup>118</sup> Lewis J. Patsavos, "The Orthodox Position on Divorce," *Diakonia* 5 (1970) 4-15, 5-6.

<sup>119</sup> Lewis J. Patsavos, "The Orthodox Position on Divorce," 6.

<sup>120</sup> Athenagoras Peckstadt, "Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: *Economia* and Pastoral Guidance," 7. Peckstadt reiterates that the Orthodox Church generally has reluctant stand regarding second marriages and it is wrong to think that Orthodox Christians are permitted to marry two or three times.

grace to be effective, requires human cooperation ("synergy"). This is true of all the sacraments, but particularly of baptism, whose fruits can be dispersed through sin and then restored through repentance. In the case of marriage, which presupposes personal understanding and psychological adjustment, Byzantine tradition accepts the possibility of an initial mistake, as well as the fact that single life, in cases of death or the simple absence of the partner, is a greater evil than remarriage for those who cannot "bear" it.<sup>121</sup>

Continuing the argument Meyendorff points out that divorce has been an essential part of the Byzantine civil legislation and it has never been questioned because of the unity between the Church and the State. Even those saints like John Chrysostom, Theodore the Studite and Patriarch Polyeuktos, who have been against the state to criticize its imperial despotism, social injustice and other sins opposite to the Gospel, were against the law concerning divorce. However, these saints regarded divorce as an unavoidable factor of human life in the fallen world, "where man can accept grace and refuse it; where sin is inevitable, but repentance always accessible; where the Church's function is never to compromise the norm of the Gospel, but to show compassion and mercy to human weakness."<sup>122</sup>

Together with this aspect of pastoral concession there is also an external development in the relationship between the Church and the state that has forced the Church in allowing divorce and remarriage. The legal procedures that are related to divorce and remarriage have become part of the Church laws only later according to the observation of Meyendorff. The basic attitude in Byzantium was that the primary function of the Church, "to make the Kingdom of God present in man's life," and that of the state, "to manage fallen humanity by choosing the lesser evil and maintaining order through legal means,"<sup>123</sup> have been kept as two distinct realities. Accordingly, there is a clear distinction between state civil marriages and church marriages. The legal aspects of marriage with divorce and remarriage were part of the state function. However, by the publication of the *Novella* 89 of Emperor Leo VI this fundamental distinction vanished, at least in practice, according to which the Church has been given the formal legal responsibility and authority to legalize all marriages. This imperial declaration has made the Church more powerful to control everything regarding marriage discipline. It has become unavoidable for the Church to engage in all compromises that have been done by the civil marriage and divorce. Like giving the legal authority to the marriage, the Church is expected to solve the legal

<sup>121</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Themes and Doctrinal Trends*, 197; John H. Erickson, *The Challenge of Our Past: Studies in Orthodox Canon Law and Church History*, 47.

<sup>122</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Themes and Doctrinal Trends*, 197-198.

<sup>123</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Themes and Doctrinal Trends*, 198.



problems related to the new task. Accordingly, the Church started "granting divorces" that have been formerly given by the secular courts and to allow remarriage in the Church. If the remarriages were not done in the Church the second and third marriages were not legally valid. However, the Church could resist the making of a fourth marriage legal even though there were many compromises regarding the acceptance of second and third marriages.<sup>124</sup>

There have been measures to consider the remarriages not at par with the first marriage, at least in principle. For the remarriages particular services were introduced by considering them as penitential in character and detaching them from the celebration of the Eucharist. This fact obviously presents the fundamental understanding of the Orthodox Church that second and third marriages are not normative, even if they are allowed too. This

means that second and third marriages are just tolerated and toleration does not imply approval, because Byzantine Orthodox theology of marriage does not consider Christian marriage as a legal contract, "automatically dissolved by the death of one of the partners." Moreover, Byzantine theology clearly underlines "the *unicity* of Christian marriage and the *eternity* of the marriage bond." Therefore, remarriage was considered as repentance, and is allowed only to those whose preceding marriages could be decided as non-existent.<sup>125</sup> Meyendorff makes clear what is the theological foundation of allowing divorce: "Marriage, if it is a sacrament, has to be projected as an eternal bond into the Kingdom of God; that like all sacraments marriage requires a free response and implies the possibility of human rejection and human mistake; and that, after such a sinful rejection or human mistake, repentance always allows a new beginning. This is the

<sup>124</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Themes and Doctrinal Trends*, 198. See also John H. Erickson, *The Challenge of Our Past: Studies in Orthodox Canon Law and Church History*, 42; Stanley Harakas, *Guidelines for Marriage in the Orthodox Church*, 11; Athenagoras Peckstadt, "Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: Economia and Pastoral Guidance," 7. "The Eastern Church rejected fourth marriage completely, even though some Christians, like the unfortunate Emperor Leo IV at the beginning of the tenth century, might attempt it. Having lost three wives without issue, he married a fourth time in the hope of gaining legitimate heir, thus touching off one of the most protracted and bitter disputes in Byzantine history and also the first major quarrel between East and West on marriage matters. Cf. John H. Erickson, *The Challenge of Our Past: Studies in Orthodox Canon Law and Church History*, 42.

<sup>125</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Themes and Doctrinal Trends*, 198. Here Meyendorff distinguishes the Orthodox marriage concept from the Medieval Latin concept terming the later as more a juridical or legal contract. He considers the Western approach as legalistically intolerant toward divorce, and he finds that there were many number of marriages after widowhood. West has been always guided by the juridical concept of contract and the bond was indissoluble until both parties are alive. He criticises that the West by holding this view of indissolubility limiting only as long as both parties are alive, has forgotten the idea that marriage as a sacrament has to be extended as an eternal bond into the Kingdom of God. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Themes and Doctrinal Trends*, 198-99.

theological basis for the toleration of divorce in the early Christian Church, as well as in Byzantium."<sup>126</sup>

In the matter of permitting divorce principle of *oikonomia* or economy is applied for a special case. This is the circumstance in which one may be entering into a religious life or may have become an ecclesiastical head as bishop. It is evident in the 12<sup>th</sup> canon of the Quinisext Ecumenical Synod. It orders that the bishops should leave their wives and this exception is termed as an act of economy.<sup>127</sup>

### The Significance of *Oikonomia* as Pastoral Concession

The early Church did not have any juridical authority concerning marriage and hence, there were any statement regarding their legality. Even the reference to the canon of St. Basil has to be understood from the perspective of a usage than a juridical edict concerning the problem of remarriage. There is very much a connection between divorce and the likelihood of remarriage, however it does not guarantee the right for another marriage *ipso facto* by the dissolution of a marriage relationship. It is only as a pastoral concession considering the human weakness

that the divorce and remarriage are permitted applying the principle of *oikonomia*. In principle divorce and remarriage are not ideal. These are exceptions. Therefore second and third marriages are considered as deviation from the "ideal and unique marriage," however, it allowed mostly as a new opening to correct the error.<sup>128</sup> This is what is obvious from Meyendorff's statement: "the Church neither 'recognized' nor 'granted' divorce. It is seen as great sin, but the Church has never ceased to offer sinners a 'new opportunity' and she always prepared to receive them again, as long as they were penitent."<sup>129</sup> It has been already stated that the Orthodox idea of remarriage is having a penitential character. In this context *oikonomia* could be considered as having its foundation on the command of Christ to his disciples: "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven" (John 20: 23). When there is human marriage as experiencing problems and in a state of impossibility to continue because of the spiritual death of love, then the Church with its understanding and compassion due to its personal concern can exercise *oikonomia*, "by accepting the divorce and not rejecting the sinful humanly weak believers, or depriving them from God's

<sup>126</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Themes and Doctrinal Trends*, 199.

<sup>127</sup> Panagiotis I. Boumes, "Married Bishops (Agreement between Sacred Scripture and Holy Canons)," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 29 (1984) 81-93, 85. The whole article deals with this problem from a historical perspective.

<sup>128</sup> Athenagoras Peckstadt, "Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: *Economia* and Pastoral Guidance," 7.

<sup>129</sup> John Meyendorff, *Marriage: an Orthodox Perspective* (New York: 1975) 64. See also Athenagoras Peckstadt, "Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: *Economia* and Pastoral Guidance," 7-8.

mercy and further grace.”<sup>130</sup> In other words, when marriage breaks down, the Church, because of its concern and readiness comes to the assistance of the persons involved and after having the civil divorce procured, in the spirit of *oikonomia* and in line with canonical and prescribed manner allows ecclesiastical divorce.<sup>131</sup> According to Elías Zoghby, in the Orthodox theology, divorce is a dispensation given to the innocent spouse in certain, reasonable cases and out of purposes of pastoral concern and in virtue of what the Orthodox name the “principle of economy.”<sup>132</sup>

In matters of mixed marriages too the principle of *oikonomia* is applied. Generally, Orthodox Church does not promote mixed

marriages, because of the belief that “the Sacrament of Marriage in the Orthodox Church takes place only between members of that Church.”<sup>133</sup> Modern times meet with many such cases. Therefore, the Church is forced to make amendments with regard to its practices. However, “mixed marriages” are allowed only when they are done in an Orthodox Church between an Orthodox Christian and a person belonging to another Christian Church. The Church performs such marriages because of its concern regarding the spiritual well-being of the couple and in view of the fact that non-Orthodox partner could take part in the activities of the Orthodox Church. This ‘bending’ of the law regarding the marriage is also technically called *oikonomia*.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Athenagoras Peckstadt, “Marriage, divorce and remarriage in the Orthodox Church: *Economia* and Pastoral Guidance,” 9.

<sup>131</sup> Stanley Harakas, *Guidelines for Marriage in the Orthodox Church*, 11.

<sup>132</sup> Zoghby observes that this principle includes the principle of indissolubility from its range. He further states that the principle of economy “is even used in much the same way as the dispensations of a valid, consummated marriage are allowed by the Catholic Church in virtue of the Petrine Privilege.” Archbishop Elías Zoghby, “The Indissolubility of Marriage,” 160. Theodore Stylianopoulos opines that the economy when applied for allowing divorces and remarriages is viewed as a transitory leniency, because of which the Church as a dispenser of divine mercy avoids bad aftermaths. Economy is an exception than a rule and because of this fact does not contradict the indissolubility of marriage. Cf. Theodore Stylianopoulos, “The Indissolubility of Marriage in the New Testament: Principle and Practice,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 34 (1989) 335-345, 344.

<sup>133</sup> *Documentation: Orthodox Ecumenical Guidelines in Diakonia* 9 (1974) 289-295, 292.

<sup>134</sup> Stanley Harakas, *Guidelines for Marriage in the Orthodox Church*, 8-9. Harakas clarifies that by the sacrament of matrimony the non-Orthodox partner does not *ipso facto* become a member of the Orthodox Church even though converts are welcome if they will for freely and genuinely. If the other partner wishes for another ceremony in his/her Church the Orthodox Church permits such rites. This is contrary to the position of Roman Catholic Church. After the Second Vatican Council, Catholic Church considers the marriage of its member in the Orthodox Church as valid. Cf. Stanley Harakas, *Guidelines for Marriage in the Orthodox Church*, 10. The proper guideline regarding economy reads like this (no. 4): “By application of the principle of *oikonomia* (economy) the Orthodox Sacrament of marriage between an Orthodox and Christian baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity, known as a *mixed marriage*, may be performed in the manner prescribed in the Service Book. The non-orthodox Christian is requested to present a Certificate of Baptism.” Cf. Stanley Harakas, *Guidelines for Marriage in the Orthodox Church*, 15; *Documentation: Orthodox Ecumenical Guidelines*, 292.



In nutshell, the Orthodox churches have unceasingly continued the patristic practice of economy in Christian experience and therefore in marriage practices. This does not mean that the Church or the patristic fathers conveniently ignored the exact sayings of Jesus against divorce and remarriage or discarded the norm of the permanence of marriage. On the contrary, the fathers being very pastoral moderates have understood the eschatological tension that exists in this Parousia. Therefore they sensed the incompleteness of the human condition that over and over again checks human beings "from responding ideally to the exact requirements of the call of matrimony."<sup>135</sup> That is the reason why the fathers, especially Basil the Great<sup>136</sup> would appeal to *oikonomia* to help those who fell short of challenging standards in the sacrament of matrimony. This patristic practice has ably been continued by the Orthodox Churches.

## Conclusion

The concept of *oikonomia* or economy, as a pastoral discretion of showing leniency with regard to giving exceptions against the strict observance of the letter of the law based on the divine philanthropy and exercised through the Church in matters for the salvation of the souls and for the general good, is of great importance in the life of the Orthodox Churches, especially the Greek

Orthodox. Even though economy is decided more on a canonical basis, from the early period of the Church onwards, mostly the specific area of application is that of sacraments, especially the sacraments that are performed outside the Church, that is, sacraments outside the canonical limits of the Orthodox Church. There have been instances of a special Church practice in accepting those who were alleged as heretics and schismatics without performing rebaptism and re-ordination. This is in reality a contradiction between theory and practice, since heretics and schismatics are outside the limits of the Church. It is in this situation that one could identify the emergence of the principle of economy in the matter of validating and recognizing those sacraments performed outside the Church. St. Basil the Great resolves this existing divergence by the theory of economy. Thus, even though not a well-defined concept, the explication on the concept and practice of economy really portrays the exact nature of the ecclesiology and sacramental theology of the Orthodox Church. However, it is interesting that the Russian theologians do not fully follow the Greek theologians in their interpretation of the practice of economy as leniency in sacramental matters. Mostly, the modern application of the concept is by the Greek Orthodox Church and the main critique comes from the Russian Orthodox Church.

<sup>135</sup> John G. Yockey, "Economic Mercy for All," 81.

<sup>136</sup> St. Basil the Great, *PG* 32, 804-5. See also Michael G. Lawler, "Divorce and Remarriage in the Catholic Church: Ten Theses," *New Theology Review* 12 (1999) 48-63, 51.

Almost all the experts and authors state that the principle of economy is not well-defined. This aspect is considered to be the main drawback of the principle of economy as a theological and canonical reality. It is difficult to identify an officially formulated version of the theory, though the practices of this are found in one way or other in almost all the Orthodox Churches. A theological point of view on the scope of the exercise of economy is not yet properly researched. Accordingly there are many theories on the principle of *oikonomia*. But, these are problems mostly for the systematic western minds. However, *oikonomia* as an expression

of the pastoral conscience of the Church in showing mercy to those who transgress the laws of the Church has in fact opened further possibilities in solving pastoral problems. Though comparatively of later origin, the application of economy on matters of divorce and remarriage of those within the Orthodox Church has really caught the attention of many Churches, especially Western Catholic Church, in the wake of mounting marriage problems. However, it should be noted that it is the theology of marriage of the Orthodox Church that allows the freedom to apply the principle of *oikonomia* in solving pastoral issues arising from divorce and remarriage.

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# Ecumenical Role of the Malankara Catholic Church: A Historico - Canonical Analysis

Dr. George Theckadayil

## Introduction

The Universal Church is the communion of different individual Churches. It is one of the fundamental ecclesiological teachings of the Second Vatican Council<sup>1</sup>. It is on the basis of this sound ecclesiological vision that the various individual Apostolic Churches are getting more and more awareness of their own individuality and autonomy without losing their essential communion and intimate union with the Holy Apostolic See of Rome.<sup>2</sup> After the great schism between East and West in 1054, the Catholic Church mainly consisted in the Western world. After the Trent Council (1545-1563), the 'Reunion Movement' started in the Church and some of the Apostolic Oriental Churches regained their ecclesial communion with the Apostolic Church of Rome and so with the Bishop of Rome.

In Malankara Church, the Apostolic Church in India, the division took place by the *Coonan Cross Oath* in 1653. The Reunion Movement headed by Archbishop Mar

Ivanios the Malankara Church retained its apostolicity and identity as an ecclesial community and regained its communion with the Holy See of Rome. It is a fact that this communion is not completely fulfilled because a major portion of the 'Malankara Church' is remaining even now without Catholic communion, scattered in different Churches and ecclesial communities.

In the last eighty three years of its Catholic communion, the Malankara Catholic Church could grow up considerably and establish its position as a Church *Sui Iuris*, regaining its vitality and spiritual strength as part of an ancient Christian community of India it is deeply rooted in the spiritual traditions and cultural values of India.

The Malankara Catholic Church has a special ecumenical role in the Universal Church, especially in the Indian context. To assess the role of the Malankara Catholic Church in ecumenism as its God-given task and special vocation, 'we need to have a deeper understanding of the nature and aim

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<sup>1</sup> cf. LG 23,26,28.

<sup>2</sup> Cyril Mar Baselios, "The Malankara Catholic Church: it's Ecumenical Role," in *Christian Orient* 8/4 (December 1987) 157 - 168.



of the ecumenical movement and the goals of ecumenical activities'.<sup>3</sup>

It is an attempt to study the ecumenical role of Malankara Catholic Church, as it is a connecting link between non-Catholic Malankara Churches and the Universal Catholic Church, based on the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches.

### **Establishment of Malankara Catholic Hierarchy in the Communion of Universal Church**

Fr. P.T. Geevarghese, a faithful disciple of Vattasserril Mar Dionysious received Episcopal consecration on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1925 to the name of Mar Ivanios of Bethany. He always argued for reconciliation and unity of the Malankara Church. In 1926, Mar Ivanios sent a letter for reconciliation with Catholic Church, to Rome, as it was decided by the Synod of Malankara Orthodox church (*Metran Kakshi*). In his letter, he asked that the ancient liturgical traditions and customs of the Malankara church must be preserved. He also asked for the jurisdiction of the bishops who would reconcile with their faithful. In response to this letter the Holy See asked six basic questions to Mar Ivanios. He responded to it in January.<sup>4</sup> He also wrote to the Apostolic delegate in India, Most Rev. Edward Moony on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1928, in which he demonstrated orthodoxy of the canon law

and liturgical books of the church and accepted the supremacy of St. Peter and his successors.<sup>5</sup>

The Holy See responded on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1929 to the letter of Mar Ivanios in 1927. According to this letter, the Holy See permitted to use the Antiochean liturgical traditions and customs if it is not against the Catholic faith and morals. The bishops who could join the Catholic faith with a notable number of faithful and priests and if they have an orthodox faith, valid consecration and personal qualities, they could be given the Episcopal authority and jurisdiction over the faithful. Those who came to the Catholic communion would not be under Syrian Catholic Patriarch of Antioch.<sup>6</sup>

The Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches made the decision on the application for the reunion of Malankara Church with the Catholic communion in July 1930 in the plenary session. The decision was communicated to Mar Ivanios through the Apostolic delegate. The congregation confirmed their right to keep the Antiochean rite without mixing it up with Syro Malabar rite. But it did not permit an ecclesiastical authority such as Catholicos and synodal system, since the then Catholicos and Malankara Metropolitan were not ready to reunite with the Catholic communion.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cyril Mar Baselios, "The Malankara Catholic Church: it's Ecumenical Role," 159.

<sup>4</sup> AAT, A, 10/ 1926, 2/1927, Documents as quoted in Sylvester Kanjiramkalil, *Ecclesial Identity of the Malankara Catholic Church*. Kottayam, 2002, 89-98.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Inchackalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, Trivandrum, 1957, 319-324.

<sup>6</sup> AAT, A, 13/1929.

<sup>7</sup> AAT, A, 18/1930.

Among the Malankara Orthodox bishops, Mar Ivanios and Mar Theophilos accepted the decision of the Holy See and thus on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1930, together with the three representatives they received the Catholic faith, and took the profession of faith before Bishop Benziger OCD of Quilon. On 11<sup>th</sup> June 1932, Pope Pius XI established the Syro Malankara hierarchy by the Apostolic Constitution *Christo Pastorum Principi*. Trivandrum was established as the Archdiocese and Tiruvalla as a suffragan diocese. Later in November 1937, Bishop Joseph Mar Severios, of Niranam diocese of Orthodox Church, reunited with the Catholic Church. Later two bishops also reconciled; Thomas Mar Dioskoros of the Knanaya Jacobite Church and Paulose Mar Philaxinos of the Thozhiyoor independent Syrian church.

### Reunion Movement: A Part of Ecumenical Movement

Jesus Christ came to unite the whole mankind in God the Father and he reconciled the humankind in his Cross. But down through the centuries there arose the divisions; many groups of the people separated themselves from the Church of Christ and lost full and visible communion with One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and formed separate Churches and communities. Both in East and West there are so many Church groups and communities. In India, especially in Kerala, the same thing happened. The Church divided into many not because

of any doctrinal clashes, but because of some other problems. The *Coonan Cross Oath* and later developments led the Church in Kerala to separate groups. It was done with the intention to preserve the identity and individuality of the Apostolic Church. But it splitted the Church in Kerala leading to further divisions and subdivisions.

But craving for reunion remained alive in the community from the beginning of the division itself. The reunion of 1930 was in fact, the crowning of the reunion attempts of the Malankara community down through the centuries. There were many other reunion attempts in the recent centuries. The reunion that took place under the initiative of Archbishop Mar Ivanios was a mile stone in the history of the Church. With the reunion "the ecclesial existence and identity of the ancient Malankara Apostolic Church was recognized within the communion of the Universal Catholic Church. Communion was reestablished with the Pope who is the Vicar of our Christ, the successor of St. Peter and the Bishop of Rome. On account of the same reason, the Malankara Church could regain its communion with all the individual Apostolic Churches of which the Pope is the Supreme Pontiff. As a result of the dialogue held between the Holy See of St. Peter and His Grace Mar Ivanios who represented the Malankara Church with the approval of the Holy Synod, the other Churches recognized that the ancient Malankara Church is apostolic and for the same reason that she has an ecclesial identity of her own".<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Cyril Mar Baselios, "The Event of Reunion and the Emerging Trends," in Thottumkal Issac (ed.) *Emerging Trends in Malankara Catholic Theology: Vision and Contributions of Cyril Mar Baselio*, Rome 1996, 247.

It is a fact that the divided Malankara Church community which has been reestablished within the Catholic communion through the reunion of 1930 has not yet been largely accepted and recognized. In this situation the ecumenical efforts in Malankara has a great relevance. The ecumenical movement and reunion movement are different, though both are related. The Second Vatican Council describes the ecumenical movement as follows; "the term ecumenical movement indicates the initiatives and activities encouraged and organized, according to various needs of the Church and as opportunities offer, to promote Christian unity".<sup>9</sup>

Thus the ecumenical movement visualizes a programme of action for maintaining the unity between the individual Churches, for regaining the lost communion and for reestablishing, as the foundation of the life of the faithful, the Church heritages which were created by God the Father in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Its mode of action consists in the mutual recognition of the Churches and in the sharing of the Church heritage which includes the unique divine teachings and the Apostolic tradition of each Church... thus this movement has the unity of the Churches, the sharing of the Churches, the sharing of the Church traditions and universal communion as its desired objectives.<sup>10</sup>

It is not favorable to see that reunion movement as equal to ecumenical movement. 'Reunion movement' is a kind of product of the post Trent Council in the universal Church. By getting inspiration from the Trent Council, there were strong evangelization programmes and reunion movements in the Church. Till Second Vatican Council this type of programmes continued. When we think on reunion movement of the Malankara Church, we have to think on both the thirst for the unity of the Malankara Church, which was an undivided Church before 1653 and have to consider the ecumenical concept of the Catholic Church before the Second Vatican Council. Sometimes the 'Reunion Movement' is understood "in a limited and sometimes even in a mistaken sense. While the ecumenical movement remains essentially a dialogue between the Churches, the reunion activities aim mainly at individuals. The reunion activities are those which give to those faithful who live their Christian life but by staying away from the universal communion of the Church, the needed information and inspiration in order to enter this communion of the universal Church and to live that life of communion. When these activities are carried out unitedly and continuously with clear objectives they take the shape of a movement. It could include both individuals and communities. Thus individuals, groups and communities could enter the Catholic communion of the Church and be

<sup>9</sup> UR 4.

<sup>10</sup>Cyril Mar Baselios, "The Event of Reunion and the Emerging Trends," 248-249



reestablished there".<sup>11</sup> In 'reunion' both individuals and communities are included. Some propagate that reunion attempts are against the ecumenical attitudes of the Catholic Church. It is a wrong opinion. Though the Catholic Church is very vigilant in the field of ecumenism, it does not prevent those who come individually and by groups to the Catholic communion. This attitude of the Catholic Church is crystal clear from the Title XVII, of the CCEO<sup>12</sup> on 'baptized non-Catholics coming in to full communion with the Catholic Church'. The Church is not discouraging those who want to reunite with Catholic faith. If the Church prevents such individuals or communities, it is also against the fundamental right of a person to choose and believe and to propagate one's own faith. The new approach "in the search for the unity of Christians consists in the Church's work for the reestablishment of full communion of faith and ministry which, though imperfect, already exists in varying degrees between the Catholic Church and the other churches and Ecclesial communities. However, while expecting the restoration of this full communion, the Catholic Church cannot in the meanwhile refuse the free and spontaneous demand of those Christians who, moved by the grace of the Holy Spirit

come to Catholic unity. This delicate matter is regulated in the present Title".<sup>13</sup>

### Is Reunion Movement Proselytism?

The word meaning of *proselytism* is 'to persuade someone to accept one's own beliefs, religion etc'.<sup>14</sup> In the ecclesiastical realm proselytism can be discussed as a deliberate effort on the part of a Catholic Church to induce individual members or groups of non-Catholic Churches to sever or cut off bonds with their Churches and to join a Catholic Church<sup>15</sup>

There are two kinds of proselytism:

a) Proselytism that is motivated by amoral or, at least non supernatural motives, and carried out through the offering of material goods, educational opportunities, or social benefits. This type of 'recruitment' of new members for the Church should be abandoned. The Church is rejecting this form of increasing membership.

b) Second type of proselytism is one motivated by spiritual reasons i.e., winning somebody to the Church that one considers to be the most complete expression of the communion of the people of God constituted in this world.<sup>16</sup> The Second Vatican Council in its decree on 'religious

<sup>11</sup> Cyril Mar Baselios, "The Event of Reunion and the Emerging Trends," 249-250

<sup>12</sup> CCEO cc. 896 -900.

<sup>13</sup> George Nedungatt, ed., *A Guide to the Eastern Code* (Kanonika 10), Rome, 2002, 597.

<sup>14</sup> *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*, 1002.

<sup>15</sup> Victor J Pospishil, *Eastern Catholic Church Law*, New York, 1996, 646.

<sup>16</sup> Victor J Pospishil, *Eastern Catholic Church Law*, 646.

liberty' rejects proselytism in the following words:

in spreading religious beliefs and introducing religious practices everybody must at all times avoid any action which seems to suggest coercion or dishonest or unworthy persuasion especially when dealing with the uneducated or the poor. Religious communities have the further right not to be prevented from publicly teaching and bearing witness to their beliefs by the spoken or written word.<sup>17</sup>

The Church is rejecting the proselytism in both its first and second meaning.

The common declaration signed by Pope Paul VI and Coptic Patriarch Shenouda III states the following:

in the name of charity, we reject all forms of proselytism in the sense of acts by which persons seek to disturb each other's communities by recruiting new members or because of attitude of mind, which are opposed to the exigencies of Christian love or to what should characterize the relationships between Churches. Let it cease, where it may exist.<sup>18</sup>

Nowadays the Church does not encourage any kind of proselytism. But if certain individuals or a group of people

come forward by their own initiatives, the Church is ready to accept them in such situations. Even when persons or groups "are making the request on their own initiative, bishops would be obliged to determine if the request is being made from the right reasons. While the Catholic Church permits now individual conversions, and reject proselytic group conversions, peculiar circumstances in some regions may make it unavoidable to receive into union with Catholic Church a community which, without solicitation and outside influence, has unanimously decided to join some Catholic Eastern Churches".<sup>19</sup>

This is what happened in the Malankara Church. After the *Coonan Cross Oath* in 1653 many unpleasant events happened in this Church. After 1665 the Antiochean rite was introduced, as a protest against latinization by the Portuguese missionaries. Those who left the Catholic union joined up with the Syrian Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch and accepted his rite. After a long time of seeking re-unification, in 1930, a group of people led by Mar Ivanios of the Malankara Orthodox Church reunited with the Catholic Church, and the Holy See of Rome established an autonomous ecclesial hierarchy in the Catholic communion. Naturally this reunion movement and erection of a hierarchy displeased those who remained in the Malankara Orthodox group.

<sup>17</sup> *Dignitatis Humanae*, n. 44.

<sup>18</sup> *Information Service* 76 (1991) 9.

<sup>19</sup> Victor J Pospishil, *Eastern Catholic Church Law*, 652.

It is true that the reunion event led by Mar Ivanios could bring the unity attempts of the Malankara Church only to a partial success. On the one side, the Roman Pontiff, recognized and declared the Apostolic foundation and heritage of the Malankara Church and all her ecclesial rights and privileges for her mission fulfillment as individual Church. But on the other side, only a small community of the Malankara Church is responding to this action positively. Only when the whole Malankara Church together so responds, does the reunion of 1930 become a real success and begin to bear fruits.<sup>20</sup> It is the duty of Christians, those who are in communion with the Catholic Church to pray and work for this purpose of the unity of the Churches. The Second Vatican Council decree on ecumenism exhorts, therefore, all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism".<sup>21</sup>

The reunion attempt of the Malankara Catholic Church is not an attempt for proselytism or uniatism. It is a part of the ecumenical activities of the universal Catholic Church, which tries to regain the unity before 1653. It is aimed to those Malankara Church communities which have not yet attained the fullness of the universal communion of the Church, who has to recognize and to receive this communion. The Malankara Catholic Church has no rest without fulfilling the unity

of all Malankara Church communities with the Bishop of Rome who is the sign of the unity of all Churches. By standing firm "on the apostolic foundations and the unique heritage of the Malankara Church and by rectifying all the damages that it suffered in the course of history, the Malankara Catholic Church should undertake to reunite all the different communities of the Malankara Church within the Catholic communion of the Church and under the supremacy of the Universal Church which protects and maintains that communion".<sup>22</sup>

It is the duty of Malankara Catholic Church that for the unity of all Malankara Church communities, they have to pray, preach and do activities; or in other word the Malankara Catholic Church should act as a connecting link between the non-Catholic Malankara Churches and the Universal Catholic Church. At the same time, as a God-given mission, the Church has the duty to preach the Good News to everybody till the end of the world. The Malankara Catholic Church aimed to bear witness to the unity and communion of all the believers in Christ as he desired and having to look forward to the evangelization of the whole world.

### **The Ecumenical Role of Malankara Catholic Church**

If we study seriously the reunion in 1930 led by Mar Ivanios, in the Malankara Church, we will discover that the event was

<sup>20</sup> Cyril Mar Baselios, "the Event of Reunion," 252.

<sup>21</sup> UR 4.

<sup>22</sup> Cyril Mar Baselios, "the Event of Reunion," 255.



the crowning point of a continuous and active dialogue between the Malankara Church and the Apostolic See of Rome. In the history of the Church we can see this strenuous effort for the reunion attempts. During the course of dialogue and discussions, the Holy See gradually approved and accepted the ecclesial identity of Malankara Catholic Church having acknowledged its spiritual traditions and heritages. Sometimes "the reunion event is badly understood or inadequately described as a return of repentant individuals to their paternal home. The non-Catholics especially those of Malankara Church look down upon it as a betrayal and desertion of their mother Church perpetuated in favor of the Roman Church. But the Reunion Movement led by Mar Ivanios, was neither a mere refuge to the paternal household nor a desertion of the maternal home surrendering it to any alien domination. That was an ecclesial event and an ecclesial act and it is clear from the history of the Reunion Movement"<sup>23</sup>. In fact the revolt, in 1653, against the Portuguese missionaries was an attempt to protect the ecclesial identity, the rights, the privileges and the autonomy of the Apostolic Church in Malankara. The reunion of the Malankara Church was "a historic encounter between two Apostolic Churches in which both were reconciled, healed and perfected in terms of fullness of communion and catholicity. The ecclesial unity achieved by the Malankara Catholic Church through the Reunion event and movement remains, perhaps, the only

event of this century in which ecumenism, or an ecumenical movement, has reached the goal it purpose to achieve"<sup>24</sup>.

## **Ecumenism in Practice in the Malankara Catholic Church**

### **1. Malankara Catholic Church: The Fruit of Ecumenism**

After the division in 1653, by the *Coonan Cross Oath*, in Malankara Church, there were many reunion attempts and finally in 1930 it was fulfilled, though only partially. Though it happened before the Second Vatican Council, it was coherent with the Council's mentality. The Reunion movement of the Malankara Church in 1930 has responded to the divine call to unity both on the individual level and on the ecumenical level and according to the correct Catholic principles. If we study closely on this movement and efforts for unity, we could understand that it has contributed to the ecclesial life and mission of the universal church in general and Malankara Church in particular. It is obvious that the contribution of the Malankara Catholic Church is significant in the ecumenical realm of the universal Church.

### **2. Ecumenical Obligations of the Malankara Catholic Church**

The Malankara Catholic Church considers the promotion of church unity as its special vocation and does involve itself in fulfilling this obligation. The teachings and

<sup>23</sup> Cyril Malancharuvil, "Malankara Catholic Church: it's Ecumenical Role," 144.

<sup>24</sup> Cyril Malancharuvil, "Malankara Catholic Church: it's Ecumenical Role," 145.

directions given by Second Vatican Council, the norms given by the Ecumenical Directories, the directions of the Apostolic See of Rome, the canon laws etc, are the guidelines for this task.

The Churches in general, agree to the need of unity of all Christians. But they cannot come to an agreement on how this unity should be attained. The Catholic Church has given certain norms and regulations to its faithful to observe in the field of ecumenism. Based on the common norms and regulations of the Catholic communion, the Malankara Catholic Church goes forward to its one of the primary duties i.e., to pray and work for unity of the Church.

By the division in 1653, the traditional juridical status of the Malankara Church has been lost and by the influence of the Antiochean Church a new liturgy and discipline were introduced among *Puthenkar* Christians. During the time of reunion in 1930, the Holy See of Rome acknowledged the traditions and liturgy of the Malankara Church, which is following Antiochean rite. Always there was an opinion from the part of Orthodox Church that, by the reunion the Malankara Church will be absorbed into the Latin Church, by losing its liturgy, discipline and the traditions. But the history proved that all these anxieties were baseless. The restoration of the juridical status was a gradual process in the Syro Malankara church from 1930 to 2005.

### 3. Fidelity to the Ancient Tradition

Fidelity to the ancient tradition is an important obligation of the Malankara Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council affirms it by stating that everyone should realize that if it is of supreme importance to understand, venerate, preserve and foster the rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches in order to faithfully preserve the fullness of Christian traditions, and to bring about reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christians, it is to be carried out.<sup>25</sup> It is a fact that the Antiochean tradition introduced in Malankara due to the latinization process of the Western missionaries was intolerable to the forefathers of the Malankara Church. Pope John Paul II demanded a process of delatinization from the Oriental Catholic Churches that they take pains to return to the ancestral traditions, if in certain ones because of circumstances of times or personages they have improperly fallen away from them<sup>26</sup>. CCEO c. 40 reminds the hierarchical heads of the various Churches *Sui Iuris* and all other hierarchs diligently come for the faithful keeping and observance of one's own rite and that they may not allow changes except by reason of its organic growth. The fidelity of the Oriental Catholics to their ancient traditions, common with the Orthodox, is a sacred duty also in view of unity. Such fidelity shows that the Catholic Church intends and applies the principle of right and duty of Oriental Churches to

<sup>25</sup> UR 15.

<sup>26</sup> AAS 82 (1990)1033.

govern themselves according to their own disciplines, commended by venerable antiquity in the Catholic communion.<sup>27</sup>

During the early period of reunion movement there was a tendency to go away from the liturgical and disciplinary traditions of the Malankara Church. During that period many zealous priests from Syro Malabar Church came to serve and help the Malankara Catholic Church. At that time in Syro Malabar Church, there was strong influence of latinization in liturgical and disciplinary norms. These priests from the Syro Malabar Church who came forward, for the formation of the clergy for the ministry and to serve the parishes introduced some of the liturgical traditions that had accrued the centuries-old latinization which they had been using. In a mistaken ambition to become the 'real Catholics', members of the Malankara Catholic Church also welcomed them.<sup>28</sup>

Fortunately there were complaints against this kind of latinization process to Rome and after detailed studies the Oriental Congregation in Rome issued clear instructions to safeguard the unique characteristics of the Malankara liturgy and its ritual customs and to avoid those which were alien to it.<sup>29</sup> The adoptions of the alienated liturgical traditions are stopped by the strong instruction given by the Oriental

Congregation for the protection of the purity of Malankara rite in 1957.

The Malankara Catholic Church tries to keep its spiritual tradition. The liturgical spirituality centered on Eucharistic celebration is the heart of Malankara spirituality. Fasting, abstinence and pilgrimage are part of the spiritual ethos of this Church.

The instruction given by the Congregation for the Oriental Churches from Rome, in 1996 says that "western devotions if it is contrary to Oriental spirituality should be erased prudently".<sup>30</sup>

The westernized form of theological thinking pattern intruded in the Malankara Catholic Church in a larger form because of the priestly formation received from Latin theological seminaries from India and abroad. The so called 'Inter Ritual Seminaries' are good in a sense, but it may do more harm to the Oriental Churches by generating among the priestly students a kind of indifferentism to the Oriental way of thinking. The Syro Malankara church started its own seminary on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1983.

For a long period of time the disciplinary system of the Malankara Catholic Church was not according to the Oriental tradition. By the elevation of the Church to the Major Archiepiscopal status, this system

<sup>27</sup> Dimitri Salachas, "The Ecumenical Significance of the New Code," in *The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches: A Study and Interpretation*, eds. Chairamel Jose and Kuriakose Bharanikulangara, Alwaye, 1992, 265.

<sup>28</sup> *Eastern Churches Quarterly*, vol. XII, n. 3 (1957) 96 – 99.

<sup>29</sup> Sylvester Kanjiramkallil, OIC, *Ecclesial Identity of the Malankara Catholic Church*, 125 - 129.

<sup>30</sup> *Instruction*, n. 38.



is changed. Now the Malankara Catholic Church has promulgated its Particular Laws by taking into consideration the norms and regulations existing in the Orthodox and other counter part churches of the Malankara. This sort of initiatives will create a more amicable atmosphere and promote mutual respect and understanding which may lead to an atmosphere of ecumenism. The principle of subsidiarity, the participation of lay people in the administration of Church temporalities and parishes, the common characteristics of Christian East, has to be preserved in the Particular Laws of the Church.

For promoting more co-operations and a sense of brotherliness, certain research centers can be started which will be very helpful to build relations between the Churches through historical, liturgical and theological research. For the same purpose it is encouraged to start theological magazines, conduct dialogues, seminars, symposiums, and lectures and this kind of programmes. They will be helpful for mutual understanding and the reception of ecumenical attitudes in the Malankara Church.

#### 4. The Obligations of the Hierarchs

It is the duty of the Synod of bishops and the Major Archbishop to establish the liturgical, ecumenical and other commissions for this Church *Sui Iuris*. The Major Archbishop can approve the liturgical books, after previous review by the Apostolic See with the consent of the Synod of bishops.<sup>31</sup> The Synod of bishops or Major Archbishop

cannot make any changes in liturgy except by reason of its organic development. This regulation is for the good of the universal Church, especially to keep traditions of the Oriental Churches.

With regard to liturgical reformation of Malankara Catholic Church, there is an obstacle in the present situation: the Orthodox Syrian Church (*Metran Kakshi*), the Syrian Orthodox Church (*Bava Kakshi*), and the Malankara Catholic Church followed the same liturgy. In the present situation there is no possibility to come together by these Churches and to have discussions on liturgy or any kind of ecclesial matters; liturgy is one of the common elements of all the *Puthenkur* communities. There are different areas of co-operation which will help these Churches in the field of ecumenism, especially in the area of liturgy. Nowadays both the Orthodox groups have strong clashes on the cause of their identity and autonomy. Even the Supreme Court verdicts cannot give any permanent solution to this problem. In this situation the Malankara Catholic Church always should hold the position that both these Churches have to come to the Catholic communion and then only this problem will be solved.

The CCEO specifically says that the eparchial bishop is moderator, promoter and guardian of the entire liturgical life in his eparchy. He has grave obligation to oversee the liturgical life of the faithful, according to the prescriptions and approved customs of his own church *Sui Iuris*. He has obligation

<sup>31</sup> CCEO c. 657 § 1.

of vigilance on the celebrating of sacraments the worship of God and devotion to saints<sup>32</sup>. The hierarchs must be very vigilant on the matter of liturgy in the Church *Sui Iuris*.

## Ecumenical Organizations and Activities in the Malankara Catholic Church

### 1. Synodal Commission and Eparchial Councils on Ecumenism

The synod of Malankara Catholic Church constituted a commission for ecumenism in the Church. On 10<sup>th</sup> March 2012, the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church promulgated the Code of the Particular Laws of the Church. The Synodal Commission is actively participating in the ecumenical field. CCEO c. 904 § 1, 2 prescribes that in every *Sui Iuris* Church initiatives of ecumenical movement may be conducted diligently by means of special regulations of Particular Law, having in mind that the Roman Apostolic See is the moderator of this movement for the universal Church. The Church wishes that every Church *Sui Iuris* has a commission of experts for the promotion of unity of churches. The ecumenical commission of every church *Sui Iuris* and eparchy has the following duties entrusted with ecumenism:

i. To put into practice the decisions of Second Vatican Council relating to ecumenism;

ii. To promote spiritual ecumenism such as private and public prayers for unity, conducting the Unity Octave prayer (January 18-25 of every year), joining in prayer with the other Christians etc,

iii. To promote dialogue of charity and theological dialogue with the non-Catholics;

iv. To promote common witness in the educational, moral and social fields.<sup>33</sup>

The Syro Malankara Synodal commission has taken into account the historical, social, liturgical, theological and spiritual concerns of the different non-Catholic Churches in India. The commission has the responsibility to popularize the ecumenical developments in the Church, so that the people may become very enthusiastic and interested in it.

In the Malankara Catholic Church, synod of bishops has to take initiatives for promoting ecumenism. In certain eparchies it is one member commission i.e., a director of ecumenism, which takes the responsibility of ecumenical efforts.

### 2. Promotion of Collaboration, Co-operation and Brotherly Respect in Ecumenism

CCEO says that collaboration with the non-Catholic Churches<sup>34</sup> is to be initiated by each Church *Sui Iuris*.<sup>35</sup> In certain fields like

<sup>32</sup> CCEO c. 199 § 1; *Nuntia* 23 (1988)22; *CD* 15.

<sup>33</sup> Dimitri Salachas, "The Ecumenical Significance of the New Code," 266.

<sup>34</sup> CCEO c. 143 § 1° 4°.

<sup>35</sup> CCEO c. 903.

education, especially with regard to the issue of self-financing education, alcoholism, social corruption etc. the Catholic and non-Catholic Churches are co-operating. CCEO opens up the possibility for inviting the members of the non-Catholic Churches as observers of the Major Archiepiscopal Assembly when it will be gathered in Malankara Catholic Church. There is such provision also in CCEO<sup>36</sup> for the eparchial assembly. This eparchial assembly has not yet began in the Malankara Catholic Church. We hope that when it constitutes the members from non-Catholic Church will be invited to it as observers. This sort of friendly co-operation would help much in the ecumenical field.

### 3. Nilackal Ecumenical Church, Kerala

There is a strong tradition that St. Thomas the Apostle established seven churches in Kerala and one of them was at *Nilackal (Chayal)*<sup>37</sup>. Nowadays it is a reserved forest area. The Government of Kerala allowed a place for the Churches in Kerala to build a church there. This is a unique endeavor of all the Episcopal Churches in Kerala for coming together in one forum. All these Churches have a common history based on St. Thomas the Apostle who is their Father in faith. Therefore, this ecumenical church, where St. Thomas founded a Christian community in the first century, is an

explicit expression of deep collaboration and co-operation between these Churches such as Syro Malabar, Syro Malankara, Latin, Malankara Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Marthoma Church, and Church of South India etc. It may be a unique event in the world. There is a dialogue centre, inaugurated in 1996, for ecumenical and inter religious dialogue. It functions also as a centre for retreat, study campus, seminars and prayer. Another programme in this ecumenical centre is the celebration of the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle and the celebration of ecumenical day which is the last Saturday of January every year ending with the Unity Octave.<sup>38</sup>

### 4. St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI), Kottayam, Kerala

SEERI is an ecumenical institution of Malankara Catholic Church, belonging to the Archdiocese of Tiruvalla. It is mainly a Syriac research centre and an ecumenical centre which is trying to promote ecumenism. In India there are seven Churches (Syro Malabar, Syro Malankara, Malankara Orthodox Syrian, Syrian Orthodox, East Syrian, Thozhiyoor Independent Church, and Marthoma Church) which all have the same Syriac patrimony.

The Institute is situated on Baker Hill, Kottayam, Kerala. It was inaugurated on September 14, 1985, by Marthoma Mathews I, the Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Church.

<sup>36</sup> CCEO c. 238 § 1.

<sup>37</sup> G. Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, Kottayam 2003, 13.

<sup>38</sup> T. Samuel, "Nilackal Trust and the Church," in *Safhaikya Sambhashanangal*, eds. Koodapuzha, Xavier and Joseph Kallarangatt, Kottayam 1996, 45 -48.



Its aim and objective is ecumenical, which works in close collaboration with all Churches, particularly those that share the syriac patrimony. It seeks to foster and deepen the mutual understanding of these Churches through close collaboration in the study and search of their common heritage.

In SEERI there is a useful library with many syriac manuscripts, liturgical books in Syriac, translation of Syriac literature in modern languages, etc.. The SEERI's programmes including doctorate, Post graduate in Syriac literature etc., SEERI has a vision to promote ecumenism and to promote Syriac language, by which the Patrimonies of the Syrian Churches are preserved and promoted.

In every fourth year SEERI organizes the World Syriac Conference. A large number of Syriac scholars, eminent oriental theologians and other experts are participating in it. SEERI is a contribution of Malankara Church in the field of ecumenism. It co-ordinates and collaborates many individuals of different Churches, both from Catholic and non-Catholic parts.

## 5. Christian Bishops' Fellowship

In Kerala every year the bishops of the Episcopal Churches in Kerala come together for a day of discussion on the issues that affect the Churches in common and has organized different commissions to fight against social evils such as alcoholism, corruption, certain government policies which are affecting minority rights in India, educational fields especially with regard to self-financing institutions etc.

With regard to certain issues the bishops of Kerala from all Episcopal churches and communities published pastoral letters against existing corruption in different levels of community life. Christian bishop fellowship took the initiative for a common pastoral letter, taking into consideration their prophetic role in the community. In 1995, a five pages pastoral letter was issued which analyzed the existing corruption in the society. In 2007 a pastoral letter was issued with regard to the protection of minority rights. In January 2008 they issued a Pastoral Letter against the increasing atheistic and temporal attitudes in the society. These well documented and well presented letters were sighted by the heads of the Episcopal Churches in Kerala as a common prophetic voice of the united Christian communities against the greatest social evils in India.

## 6. Ecumenical Clergy Fellowship

With regard to the fellowship of Christian priests, there is no unified or uniform form of fellowship. But in many places in local levels the Christian priests gathered together and discussed many matters which affected the pastoral field. It has a collective form all over in Kerala, and also in India, it will have a witnessing value in the ecumenical realm.

## 7. Inter-Church Council for Education

It is another common endeavor of the Churches in Kerala to protect their rights to conduct their own educational institutions effectively, promote the Christian values and to increase the quality of education in the Christian educational institutions etc. The

Christian educational institutions are the largest private sector in the educational field of Kerala. They fight against the policies of the government that affect their educational rights, protected by the Constitution of India in order to give education for children in their own cultural and religious background and to protect the schools and other educational institutions from strikes and political influences. The council is always in dialogue with political parties and government for protecting the minority rights, cultural and Christian values.

In all these cases the Catholic Church takes the initiative and tries to co-ordinate other Christian Churches, as it is prescribed in CCEO c. 908. It is desirable that the catholic faithful having observed the norms on '*Communicatio in Sacris*', undertake any project in which they can co-operate with other Christians, not only by themselves but to act together in common issues like, charitable works and works of social justice, the defense of the dignity and the fundamental rights of the human person, promotion of peace, days of commemoration for one's country, national holidays. The Church in India is only a small group of the total population. But the service given by the Christian community especially in the field of education, literacy mission, public health, social service etc., is precious. From this fraternal collaboration the believers in Christ, besides being better known and esteemed show forth their common faith in gospel values, confronting such grave problems of the

world in the light of Christian understanding of humanity and the world. The crucial problems of our time-social injustice, underdevelopment, illiteracy, hunger, secularization, ideological and practical atheism, various violations of human right, extreme poverty and extreme rich, crime, drug etc., make an urgent appeal to all the Churches and Christian communities for prayer and common endeavor to save the world and to give a spiritual meaning to life and to the human person.<sup>39</sup>

Besides these above ecumenical programmes there are also some other ecumenical prayer groups, ecumenical charitable trusts, ecumenical Christmas celebrations, etc. In many places the Church Unity Octave prayer is conducted in an effective manner. The Malankara Catholic Church always actively involves in all the ecumenical activities of the Churches in Kerala.

### **Ecumenical Formation in the Malankara Catholic Church**

Since the Malankara Catholic Church is the fruit of ecumenical attempts, the people have an ecumenical attitude in themselves. But this knowledge may not be in tune with the teachings of the Catholic Church, especially with the Post-conciliar teachings. An ecumenical formation is to be given to the faithful, the seminarians, the religious, and to the priests. They must have sufficient knowledge on other church communities, especially those non-Catholic counterparts of

<sup>39</sup> Dimitri Salachas, "The Ecumenical significance of the New Code," 269.

Malankara Church. Such knowledge must lead them to respect others. Lack of ecumenical information and formation may lead to confusion, indifferentism, or immoderate zeal etc.<sup>40</sup> the mutual knowledge "is an essential imperative in the search of the unity of Christians".<sup>41</sup> The Second Vatican Council's decree on ecumenism affirms that ecumenical formation is given to all kinds of Christian faithful. It speaks as follows: "We must become familiar with the outlook of our separated brethren. Study is absolutely required for this, and it should be paused in fidelity to the truth and with a spirit of good will. Catholics who already have a proper grounding need to acquire a more adequate understanding of the respective doctrines of our separated brethren, their history, their spiritual and liturgical life, their religious psychology and cultural background.... Sacred theology and other branches of knowledge, especially those of a historical nature, must be taught with due regard for the ecumenical point of view, so that they may correspond as exactly as possible with the facts. It is important that future pastors and priests should have mastered a theology that has been carefully elaborated in this way and not polemically, especially in what concerns the relations of separated brethren with the Catholic Church."<sup>42</sup>

The Malankara Church has its own theological formation house for seminarians. Here the inter-ecclesial dialogues, seminars, and other extra curriculum activities related to ecumenism are conducted for the seminarians. The authorities are to find out more co-operative realms with the non-Catholics. There is also lay formation centres.

The religious institutions may promote the unity of Christians through their prayer for unity, i.e., through the spiritual ecumenism. They can have a council or commission in the central level for promoting and assisting ecumenical activities.<sup>43</sup> The religious institutes working in the Malankara Church do not have such ecumenical councils or commissions. But they are interestingly working for the unity of the Churches.

In the catechetical field, both for students and adults, there must be ecumenical formation. The catechetical books should avoid expressions and ways of presenting the doctrine that can be an obstacle to dialogue<sup>44</sup>. In the catechism texts, all the truths whether it is historical, theological, and liturgical must be given, but any harmful words and usages are to be avoided. The new catechism texts prepared by the catechetical department of the Malankara Catholic Church are helpful to the students to grow in their faith and traditions respecting the faith of others.

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<sup>40</sup> CCEO c. 905.

<sup>41</sup> *Dimitri Salachas*, "The Ecumenical Significance of the New Code", 267.

<sup>42</sup> UR 9- 10.

<sup>43</sup> *Ecumenical Directory 1993*, n. 51.

<sup>44</sup> *Ecumenical Directory 1993*, n. 61.



The theological study centers of the Malankara Catholic Church especially in SEERI, Kottayam, Kerāla and the lay theological centers in different eparchies are giving importance to the studies of ecumenism, especially the ecumenical aspects of liturgy, history, theology, spiritually and discipline.

### Sharing Spiritual Activities and Places

This is an important, rich and vast area of co-operation between Catholics and non-Catholics in India. The churches, liturgical articles, sacred places such as cemetery and prayer hall or churches as well as certain sacraments can be shared among the Churches and ecclesial communities according to the norms of the universal Catholic Church. This is very important today in India's situation i.e., many families are migrating to big cities and are unable to find their own place of worship, ministers and cemetery for funeral. This is very common in important cities in India.

In many parts of Kerala, and all over India, common prayer groups are forming known as ecumenical prayer groups. It is the duty of the Catholic Church pastors to give corrective directives to their own people. Otherwise it may deviate and make much

harm in the Church. The sharing in sacramental life also must be very carefully dealt with non-Catholic Churches, according to the norms given by the Codes of Canon Law and other directives of the Church.

### Conclusion

I was dealing with certain practical norms with regard to the role of Malankara Catholic Church in the ecumenical field. With a short historical background of the Malankara churches I tried to study on Malankara Catholic Church and how it emerged in the history of the Church. It has a special ecumenical role in the universal Church, because this Church *Sui Iuris* in itself is the fruit of a long term ecumenical activities emerged in the Malankara Church. After the division in Malankara Church in 1653, there were many reunion attempts in the history. But in a partial way it was fulfilled only in 1930. The Malankara Catholic Church has no rest till the communion is achieved of all Malankara Churches to the Universal Catholic Church. The Church prays for the unity, tries to give fidelity to the ancient traditions for having better knowledge of each other and to give brotherly respect and collaboration with other Churches who are not yet in full communion with the Bishop of Rome.



# News

## **EXTRA ORDINARY SYNOD ON FAMILY**

The third extra ordinary synod of Bishops convened by Pope Francis in Rome was concluded on 19 October 2014. This synod discussed mainly the theological and pastoral issues related to marriage and family in the context of the modern world.

## **BEATIFICATION OF PAUL VI**

Pope Paul VI was declared blessed by Pope Francis on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> October, on the occasion of the concluding Holy Qurbana for the extra ordinary synod of Bishops. As Pope, he lead the church from 1963 June 21 to 1978 August 06. *Popuorum Progressio*, *Humanae Vitae*, *Ecclesiam suam* (1964), etc. are some of his famous encyclicals.

## **YEAR OF THE CONSECRATED MEN AND WOMEN**

Pope Francis declared the year 2015 as the year of the consecrated. It dates from November 30, 2014 to February 2, 2016. He invites all the believers to gratefully pray for all those who are living consecrated life all over the world.

## **CANONIZATION OF CHAVARA KURIAKOS ELIAS AND EUPRASIA**

St. Kuriakos Elias Chavara and St. Euphrasia were proclaimed saints by Pope Francis on 23 November 2014. They are two saintly people from the soil of Kerala from the Syrian Christian community. Fr. Chavara is well known as a socio-cultural protagonist both in the society and in the Church. Sr. Euprasia led a deep mystical prayer life.

## **INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM ON ECUMENISM**

An international theological symposium on ecumenism was conducted on November 26-27, 2014 in St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor, Kottayam as a joint venture of the seminary and the faculty of the Pontifical Oriental Institute of Religious Studies (*Paurastya Visyapitham*). This was conducted in the context of the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the publication of *Lumen Gentium*, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* and *Unitatis Redintegratio* of Vatican II in order to promote the ecumenical initiatives of the different Churches.



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Vadavathoor P.O., Kottayam - 686 010; Kerala, INDIA

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373. **Scaria Kanniyakonil**, *Kaumaralaingikavidyabhyasam Kristsvavazhiyiloode*, Kottayam, 2013, pp. 84.
374. **James Puliurumpil**, *Nikhya Muthal Vatianvare*, Kottayam, 2013, pp. 304.
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376. **John Moolan**, *Sacraments of Initiation of Syro- Malabar Church*, Kottayam, 2013, pp. 330.
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